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# A Qualitative Study of the Motivating Factors, Perceptions, and Experiences of Mentors Involved with Elementary Students During In-school and After-school Programs

Aaron D. Berning  
*Cedarville University*

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE MOTIVATING FACTORS, PERCEPTIONS, AND EXPERIENCES OF  
MENTORS INVOLVED WITH ELEMENTARY STUDENTS DURING IN-SCHOOL AND AFTER SCHOOL  
PROGRAMS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Education

By

AARON DAVID BERNING

B.A. Elementary Education, Cedarville University, 1998

2013 Cedarville University

## ABSTRACT

Berning, Aaron M.Ed. Education Department, Cedarville University, 2013

A qualitative study of the motivating factors, perceptions, and experiences of mentors involved with elementary students during in-school and after-school programs.

This qualitative study focused on the thoughts, attitudes, and opinions of mentors working with elementary age students. Volunteers were taken for the study from two mentoring programs; an academically based tutoring program which took place during the school day and a more relationally oriented program involving teens working with students after school. Both programs took place in a public school with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged children. Participants were asked questions about their perceptions of student needs, their successes with their individual mentee(s), the strength of the program they were involved in, and about their personal thoughts and opinions on their experience. These results have been extrapolated into further insights and suggestions for continued success and for building greater effectiveness into mentoring programs. Suggestions include ideas on recruiting and training mentors, greater communication between mentors and teachers, and developing longer term relationships between mentors and students.

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## **Introduction**

The term "mentor" has become a catchword in American society regarding the development of our youth. Public service commercials on TV have espoused the value of mentors and encourage people to get involved in the lives of children. Public and private schools, churches, and publicly and privately funded social organizations all have a hand in programs geared toward the academic, moral, and social growth of children in our communities. Over the past decade more than 4,500 groups and agencies have been involved in some way in the mentoring process (Dubois & Karchner, 2005; Rhodes, 2002). People have responded to the call for mentors nationwide. Mentoring.org, a national mentoring database reported in 2005 there were approximately 870,000 adults mentoring children within a school setting. This does not even account for those involved in other public and religious institutions.

A great majority of these programs deal with "at-risk" kids: children whose futures are in jeopardy due to negative influences from home life and other environmental factors beyond their control such as the neighborhoods they live in and the peer group they are surrounded by. Also included in the diagnosis of at-risk kids are cognitive and learning disabilities which interfere with success in school (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, McMaken, 2011) . Yet another factor is the prevalence of students with no structured supervision after school. Combined with the other factors mentioned here, higher tendencies toward self destructive and socially disruptive behavior are increased. (Stephens, 2010).

These challenges are significant, yet the mentoring process has shown great promise in being able to begin to address them. The influence of mentoring has been shown to help academic performance (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002;

Dubois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper 2002), adult relationships - especially the parent relationship- (Rhodes Grossman, and Resch, 2000), and even peer relationships (Hughes, Cavell, Meehan, Zhang & Collie, 2005).

Mentoring programs have worked in places like Los Angeles, where the BEST program (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) has shown positive effects for participants in the areas of attendance rates, academic performance, and improved self esteem (Fleming, 2011). School and community based programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters also showed modest but significant gains in similar areas. (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, McMaken, 2011)

Public perception of the need for mentoring programs and the overall support of these programs is also very positive. A nationwide survey taken by the non-partisan Afterschool Alliance revealed overwhelming support for afterschool programs. 69% of participants thought that there were not enough afterschool programs. 81% of those polled expressed a desire to see such programs take places in schools, community organizations, and other public facilities. Additionally, over 52% shared that the isolated, unsupervised condition of many children after school hours was a major concern. (Branch, 2000)

Clearly mentoring is an important part of the fabric of our society when it comes to the education and care of our children in the hours following the official school day.

### **Definition of Terms**

The specifics of this study will take place surrounding the mentoring programs offered at Central Elementary School within the Sidney City School district in Sidney, Ohio. Sidney, Ohio is a town of 20,00 people. Central Elementary School is a K-3 Elementary building with a 60% free lunch population, thereby qualifying for Title 1

money from the federal government. A variety of mentoring programs are offered at Central Elementary. Below is a listing of the names of the programs that will be referenced throughout this paper and a brief description of those programs. Also included here will be definitions for the categories of participants involved.

**Definitions** *TEAMS*- Abbreviation for Together Everyone Achieves More. This program is run during the school day. Classroom teachers identify students who they feel need additional academic help and/or the influence of another positive adult role model.

*Central Zone*- A program run out of the Presbyterian Church in Sidney which is 1 block down the street from Central Elementary. This program is run for one and a half hours every Tuesday. Mentors work with students on homework and basic reading skills.

Teacher referrals are made for students who struggle with completing homework or where there is a known deficiency of academic support in the home environment.

*Big Buddies*- A twice a month after school program run by the Big Brother Big Sisters organization. Volunteers are local high school students who volunteer for the program who are approved by the guidance counselor and have references from two of their teachers. During the program there is a time for students to work with their mentor on homework while the rest of the time is dedicated towards communication and bonding through structured games and free time. Teacher referrals are made for students who demonstrate a lack of social skills or show impulsive or aggressive behaviors. Parent requests for involvement in the program are also accepted.

*community mentor*- Mentors recruited for the TEAMS program from the community at large.

*church mentor*- Mentors involved in the Central Zone after school program who are either members of the Presbyterian Church or recruited by them.



*Mentee*- students in grades 1 - 3 that have been identified and accepted as candidates for different programs. Parental consent was needed for involvement in all programs.

### **Statement of the Issue**

As evidenced in the introduction, plenty of research exists on the effects and results of mentoring programs based on changes in student behaviors, self-reflection, and academic performance. However, there is much less study and information on perceptions and opinions of the mentors themselves on the effectiveness and impact of the programs they are involved in. The Thomson and Zand (2010) study on mentees' perceptions of mentors' impact on their interpersonal relationships suggests "obtaining (the) mentor's perspective on the quality of the relationship would likely be especially helpful in determining the convergence between the mentors' and youths' reports as well as the relative contributions of each perspective in predicting youths' interpersonal and other outcomes".

The primary research question for this study will be: What are the motivating factors, perceptions, and experiences of individuals involved in mentoring relationships? This study will seek an answer to this question and come to an understanding of mentor's views in the following areas: motivation for being a mentor, perception of the needs of mentees, perception of personal success with the program, perception of the success of their mentee(s), problems with the program, suggestions for improvement.

### **Methods of procedure**

Eighteen mentors were randomly chosen to participate in the study. To the greatest degree possible (see delimitations) the percentage of males versus females and adults versus students for the whole group were replicated in the grouping selected from each program.

**Interview** The following interview questions will be asked of all selected participants. After all information has been gathered an open coding process will be used to list key statements or ideas regarding mentor motivation and perceptions among research participants. Responses to interview questions will then be disaggregated for the different programs and between differences indicated on the demographics survey. The researcher will then categorize similar responses through an axial coding process and check for differentiation of patterns in several areas.

1. General similarities of responses among all participants. What themes develop?
2. Do any themes or main ideas match up more directly with specific groups of mentors based upon their demographics: age, employment (current or former), marital status, or number of children? After similarities were coded by the disaggregated information, emergent themes among the various categories of mentors was translated by the researcher into specific categories of perceptions and suggestions for individual programs. This selectively coded data will also be used to further understand the viewpoints and strengths of various demographics of mentors. This data can then be used to more effectively recruit and train mentors in the future.

**Scope of the study and delimitations** Eighteen participants were interviewed for this study. Thirteen were adult-aged mentors and five were teen-aged mentors. All interviews were conducted within two months after the conclusion of all programs for the school year. No mentors from the Central Zone program at the Presbyterian Church responded to my interview request. Of all adult respondents all but one were retired individuals.

**Significance of the study** There are several levels of significance to this study. One level of significance involves looking at the background information of mentors,

particularly those who were the most satisfied with the results of the program and its effectiveness with their mentee(s). Similarities emerged in the comments and viewpoints of mentors with similar backgrounds. By finding common denominators among mentors with the highest levels of perceived effectiveness school and program administrators will be able to more accurately recruit mentors with a high rate of success and longevity in the program. A second level of significance will come from looking at the responses of mentors in regards to what they feel doesn't work, is frustrating, or needs to be changed in the program. For programs with high turnover either during the school year or from year to year, having such information may be useful for improvement of the program to prevent attrition of mentors.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

This review of existing literature on the mentoring process will focus on the work that has been done quantitatively and qualitatively on the mentors' motivations and perceptions and experiences on the processes and rewards, and of the benefits received by mentoring. In addition, literature related to the benefits to mentees is presented. The mentoring relationship is a complex and multifaceted one, holding benefit for both mentor and mentee. While both parties play an active role in the process, it is the role of the mentor that drives the relationship. A thorough understanding of mentor perspectives is crucial to recruiting effective mentors, maintaining mentor voluntarism, as well as eliciting the most positive ongoing relationships with their mentees.

The following topics will be addressed: the characteristics of mentoring relationships that are the most beneficial to the mentee, the demographics of who mentors are and which groups make the most consistent and reliable mentors, what drives mentors to volunteer initially and to stay with the programs, and what benefits there are to mentors, both for younger and older volunteers.

#### **Benefits of mentoring to the recipient mentee**

Though this study will focus on mentor's experiences and motivations, as well as the benefits in mentoring, it must not be forgotten that the children involved in the process, the mentees, are at the heart of the entire endeavor. The benefits obtained by the youth involved in the process are central to the mentor, mentee experience. The success of the mentees drives what mentors do. The research demonstrates that mentoring provides substantial benefits to mentors. Thomson and Zand (2009) indicate in their

research with youth and governmental agencies that youths' perceptions of their interpersonal relationships with adults; attachment with parents (or other adult raising them), self-disclosure to adults and friendships with adults, were shown to be built through mentoring relationships. In their work with a School Based Mentoring Program (SBM) Herrera, Grossman, Kauh & McMaken (2011) looked at results from a five month Big Brother Big Sisters program. The perceptions and realities of mentee's academic performance were observed by both the mentees themselves and their teachers. "Relative to their non-mentored peers, youth experienced modest academic benefits. Teachers reported small gains in academic performance, while youth reported similar improvement" (pg. 356). Yet the results of a further reaching fifteen month follow up with the same mentees found some of these benefits were short lived outside the course of a single school year if the mentoring relationship did not continue. This decline placed the mentees at the same level as their non-mentored peers by late fall of the following school year.

Another benefit that can be attributable to mentoring programs is improvement in school attendance. A one year study by Volkmann and Bye (2006) in an elementary school of 301 students showed more than a 20% improvement in the attendance of students demonstrating attendance problems when they knew they would be meeting with a reading partner. Identified students participating in the reading partners program "were less likely to be absent on the days when they were scheduled to meet with their reading partners at a statistically significant level ( $p=.004$ ). The rate of absence on the day that the reading partners and students were scheduled to meet was 1.7 per student. On days students were not scheduled to meet with their adult reading partner, they had a mean absence rate of 2.25" (pg. 150)

## **Mentor demographics and service**

The demographics of who volunteers to work as mentors gives a start to understanding what the mentoring process is all about. In 2006 MENTOR magazine found that approximately 870,000 adults were mentoring children at in-school settings. In a specific study of 554 mentors in an in school Big Brothers Big Sisters program Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken (2011) found 72% of volunteers were female and 77% were white. A study by Brent (2001) found a majority of volunteers were 56 or older, with a second largest group comprised of students under twenty suggesting that retirees and high school students are prevalent among the pool of volunteers for mentoring. Furthermore, Brent found that 22% of the volunteers were former schoolteachers. Another study by Brent (2000) of 575 volunteers in an in-school elementary program found 88% to be female. In this study many volunteers (68%) were working in their own child's school, suggesting many mothers becoming involved. In contrast to Brent's other study previously mentioned the 2000 study found less than 1% of volunteers under the age of 20. Another study by Caldarella, Gomm, Shatzer & Wall (2010) found similar results with 68% of volunteer mentors being female as well as 68% of volunteers being somehow involved in education as either currently teaching, being retired from the profession, or as a current student. Caldarella et.al. also found 49% of volunteers in their study to be over 50 years of age. Another interesting finding of this study showed 86% of volunteers with more than a high school degree and 50% with an associates degree or higher. Recruiting of mentors most frequently comes from school personnel, friends, family members, colleagues, churches, civic groups, and community organizations (Caplan, Calfee 2006; Larkin, Sadler, Mahler 2003) with religious organizations being a strong contributor (Wilson, Musick 1999). There are, however, other sources for the

recruitment of mentors. A case study of a Big Brothers Big Sisters program in New York City involved volunteers from 32 businesses who gave company time for employees to be a part of a mentoring program through the Workplace Mentoring Program(Fitch 2004).

A further breakdown of mentor voluntarism reveals the content areas where mentors are volunteering. The two studies by Brent (2000 & 2001) working with 575 volunteers in 57 elementary school show 53% and 41% of mentors assisting students with reading and writing activities while 30% and 24% helped with mathematics activities. After a 15% participation number for assisting with make-up work, help in all other subject areas dropped off to nominal levels.

#### **Goals: Purposes for mentoring, perceived needs of mentees**

Some broadly defined benefits of mentoring have been mentioned above. The purpose of this section is to look at more specific areas where mentoring is used to benefit children. This section includes ways that mentors are used, specifically at in-school settings, but also begins to address the views of the mentors and their perceptions of the needs of the children they work with as well as what they were able to bring to the relationship.

A clear goal of many in-school and afterschool mentoring programs is that of academic improvement. One program that has clearly defined goals in this area is LA's BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The goal of the program is to "help kids make connections, enhance the skills and standards learned during the core day, and give opportunities to make sense of what was taught." Clear alignment is made between what goes on during the school day and what occurs at the afterschool program so that the time is well spent towards a targeted

end. (Fleming, 2011)

Academic growth is most often the primary goal of school districts running mentoring programs, as evidenced in studies by Brent (2000, 2001) finding that 86% of volunteers in the 57 school he studied were mainly involved in academic activities. Yet in the eyes of many mentors there are other, equally important goals for the children. In three studies containing mentor interviews, mentors perceived needs of children included: keeping them out of trouble during unsupervised time after the school day, modeling appropriate behaviors and problems solving skills, and valuing and looking for the rewards of hard work (Daud & Carruthers, 2008); exposure to other educational experiences like zoos, museums, and libraries, as well as concerns over the academics of the mentees (O'Donnell, Michalak, & Ames, 1997), and falling in with the wrong crowd (Branch, 2000). A study of mentors in primary, secondary, and post-secondary setting by Reddick, Griffin, and Cherwitz (2011) found that "Many mentors shared that they engaged in their work because they had received guidance and wanted to contribute to another generation" to "ensure that future generations had a more positive experience than they did" (pg. 64)

### **Goals and motivations of mentors**

In a German study on causes and motivations for volunteering Meier and Stutzer (2008) defined that causes can be divided into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations are comprised of the internal values driving ones actions and the satisfaction received by the participant regardless of the outcome. Extrinsic motivations are associated with a reward either to the individual themselves or through positive and tangible benefits to others or the cause in general. Furthering these two central principles of motivation Batson, Ahman, and Tsang (2002) looked at comments



from volunteers regarding their reasons for starting and continuing in a program and defined four categories of motives "egoism: The ultimate goal of which is to increase ones own welfare, altruism: aimed at increasing the welfare of another individual or individuals where empathy is central to the motivation, collectivism: which seeks to increase the welfare of the group, and principles: which aims to uphold one or more moral principles." (p. 434)

In another study Clary and Snyder (1997) empirically divided the benefits of voluntarism into 6 categories: "*Values* such as humanitarianism and altruism: *Understanding*, or the need to seek learning experiences that help people better understand others and themselves: *Social* where volunteering provides an opportunity for people to interact with friends while engaged in favorable activities: *Career* experience and advancement: *Protective* purpose allows people to work with and eliminate negative feeling such as anxiety, loneliness, and guilt: *Enhancement* which increases self-esteem and other positive emotions in the volunteer." (p.157). All of these categories from both sources serve as excellent conceptual frameworks for viewing mentors motivations.

**Intrinsic Motives** In the Batson, Ahman, and Tsang's (2002) altruistic, collectivist, and humanitarian veins many mentors and other volunteers are driven by a desire to give back to the community that they are a part of or to impart wisdom to the next generation that they either had imparted to them or learned through hard earned experience. Also along these lines exists the desire to be a helping hand for those less fortunate through caring friendship and through being a role model. In a study of Big Brothers Big Sisters mentors and their views on mentoring, de Anda (2001) and Reddick, Griffin, Cherwitz (2011) found motivations that fall into some of the general themes discussed in the other research above. The following quotes from her research provide a

more in depth understanding of these mentors views and motivations of their work.

"Initially for me it was just wanting to do something, wanting to get involved in the community...This is my way of giving back."

"It is important to get back to the old neighborhood sense...

If I can bring that to the table as an experience I had growing up...

if I can bring some of my basic knowledge of all the terrible things they have on them today, I can explain how you can utilize that to be a strength for you."

"Give them a helping hand. Let them know that there are people out there who care."

"Lots of kids don't have any support. They don't have an ear. They don't have anyone they can talk to. I'm glad to be that ear."

"... see that we're somewhat successful. Maybe that'll open their eyes and they'll say 'Yeah, if they can do it, maybe I can do it.' "

(deAnda, 2001, p.106-107)

"I see this reciprocity-mentor and mentee challenging each other as the essence of the mentorship experience. I've been fortunate to have good mentors in my life who continue to guide and support me... I take very seriously my responsibility to offer similar support to other people." (Reddick, Griffin, Cherwitz, 2011, p.64)

**Extrinsic Motivations** Wilson & Musick (1999) concluded, "It is a reasonable assumption that people who are well rewarded for their work are more likely to continue doing it." (pg. 248) This poses the question of what extrinsic rewards are attainable through the mentoring process? The answer to this question has multiple facets. Rewards and benefits of mentoring go hand in hand, the latter of which will be explored further in the next section of this study's literature review. Extrinsic motivation can be categorized into three groups: employment and experience, social bridges, and personal improvement.

For those seeking employment either for the first time, or due to unemployment often use mentoring and other volunteer efforts to build their experience, maintain activity, establish contacts, and build a resume. (Meier & Stutzer, 2006)

Social bridges can be built among volunteer mentors during their service with one another. A study by Brady & Dolan (2009) found great support among mentors for increased interaction and support among their mentoring peers for purposes of enhancing their effectiveness and in discussing the successes and difficulties of their roles as mentors. An element of loneliness also expressed among mentors was relieved with increased interaction with other mentors.

Doing good works has also been shown to be motivated by what the volunteer perceives others to be thinking and doing (Wilson & Musick, 1999), and that it can provide an increased measure of prestige and respect among peers (Wilson, 2000).

### **Benefits to Mentors**

Benefits to the mentors themselves through the mentoring process are significant and multi-faceted. Distinctions between various benefits are most easily drawn according to differences in age and status of life. This study will look at researched benefits for

younger volunteers (teens and college age), general benefits and benefits to employed adults, and benefits to older adults.

**Teens and College-age students** In the demographics section of this literature review it was noted that in some studies younger volunteers made up a smaller but important part of the overall body of mentors. Despite concerns of selection bias that conforming children are more apt to volunteer, research suggests that teen volunteers are more apt to stay away from trouble (Wilson, 2000). College age students also benefit in specific ways from mentoring. Many universities require community service or make service a part of course work. Through this, students in related fields learn through real world experience (Jucovy, 2001). Other benefits to college students include an increase in their personal knowledge of child development, which is useful not only to those going into the fields of education, pediatrics, or other child related careers but to those who will someday become parents themselves. Students' awareness and sensitivity to at-risk children is also heightened through such interactions, (Caldarella, Gomm, Shatzer, & Wall, 2010) as well as beliefs regarding children and individuals from different backgrounds (Banks, 2010). Other studies suggest that collegiate involvement in mentoring programs promotes diversity and lessens racial prejudice (Eppler, Ironsmith, Dingle, Errickson, 2011; Lee, Germain, Lawrence, Marshall, 2010). Service in mentoring programs also serves young adults well as a means of providing input and clarification toward career goals (Eppler, Ironsmith, Dingle, Errickson, 2011); (Shepard, 2009).

**Adults and those in the Workforce** Research indicates benefits for adult mentors are wide ranging and include perceptions of young people, as well as personal, and vocational benefits. In a study by Phillip and Hendry (2000) mentors reported their

interactions with their mentors provided them with a greater sense of the realities of young people's daily experiences, a chance to redefine how young people and adults relate to one another, and as a chance to provide support in their lives. A high percentage of mentors also reported personal benefits including improved communication and leadership skills that they learned and used in their relationships with their mentees. (O'Donnell, Michalak, & Ames, 97). 75% of working mentors in a study by Hancock (2003) reported that their mentoring activities helped them have an improved attitude at work and a new perspective on life in general. Working closely within a school setting also gave mentors a new viewpoint and appreciation for the work that goes on within the educational setting. 95% of volunteers said they have a greater respect for teachers since volunteering, while 87% said the same of administrators. 90% reported being more knowledgeable about school operations and 88% reported being more interested in educational issues (Brent, 2001). Volunteers in general were also found to be less prone to depression (Wilson & Musick, 1999).

**Older Volunteers** Rowe & Kahn (1998) define successful aging as a combination of three components: avoiding disease and disability; maintaining high mental and physical function; and sustained engagement with life which means participating in relationships with others and being productively involved in activities. Mentoring meets the criteria for all of the attributes for successful aging. Research is not conclusive, yet highly suggestive that volunteering among the elderly is positively correlated with greater life satisfaction (Wheeler, Gory, Greenblatt, 1998), stronger physical health through the aging process (Stephan, 1991), a lower risk for early mortality (Musick, Herzogg, House, 1999 ; Oman,Thoreson, McMahan, 1999), higher levels of retained functional ability (Moen, Dempster-McClain, Williams, 1992), and filling the time gap left by grown

children who have left the house (Schneider, 1990). A study by Kulik (2002) also found that in houses where both marital partners were volunteers, there was an increase in marital satisfaction as well.

### **Successful mentoring and retention of mentors**

As in all relationships there are certain hallmarks of success. Numerous studies have found specific areas that are critical to forming positive, beneficial mentor - mentee relationships. Frequency of meetings between mentor and mentee is one important factor (DuBois & Neville, 1998). Data suggests that once weekly meetings hold the highest level of benefits for mentees while those who met less than once a week had reduced effectiveness (Chan & Ho, 2005). The overall time frame of the entire relationship is also found to have effect on the quality and benefit of the interaction between mentor and mentee. Results were found to be greater when the length of the relationship was longer (Hancock, 2003 ; Chan & Ho, 2005 ; Keller & Pryce, 2012) and when the match of mentor and mentee occurred at a younger age (Hancock, 2003). Furthermore, short term relationships showed no benefits or, in some cases, even negative consequences, especially in social areas and prevention of violent behavior. (Keller & Pryce, 2012).

While finding effective mentors is a challenge for programs, retaining them is also an issue deserving of attention. A study by Wilson & Musick (1999) found various factors that affected prolonged service by mentors. Among their findings was the fact that more highly educated people are not only more likely to volunteer in the first place, but also more likely to continue volunteering. This finding is also supported by the information in the mentor demographics and service section of this study's literature review. Wilson & Musick also concluded that frequent contacts among volunteers in social settings such as club meetings, societies, and religious services also positively

affected volunteer retention. The higher the number of hours initially volunteered at the beginning of a volunteer's time also had a positive correlation with continued service. Findings in this study also showed a correlation between the number of children in a volunteer's household and their continued service. Volunteers with higher numbers of children in their household continued volunteering longer than those with less or no children. Age also carried implications in attachment to continued voluntarism. The 55 – 64 age range along with a category for "older parents" held the highest rate of attachment, while young married couples were among the lowest. The values and motivations of volunteers and their connections to volunteering also showed variance. Those volunteers with church related motivations showed greater attachment than other groups such as those working for political organizations, labor unions, or even for educational issues. Another factor influencing continued service of volunteers involves the meeting of mentor's initial expectations. Volunteers who felt their initial motivations were met and who were able to express important values were more likely to continue in their efforts (Calderra, Gomm, Shatzer & Wall 2010). A study of mentor viewpoints by Allen & Poteet (1999) gleaned from mentors and mentees that trust, communication, and clearly set standards and expectations were critical elements in the developing relationship.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Distribution of Interview Requests**

To gather volunteers for the interview process a letter explaining the purpose of this project (Appendix A) requesting a short 10 minute interview was placed into the hands of as many mentors in the three different programs as possible. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included. Due to an inability to meet personally with the mentors due to classroom responsibilities, I had to rely on the project coordinator of the TEAMS program at Central Elementary School to promote and dispense the letters. The project coordinator reported that most mentors responded positively and took a letter home. Appendix B contains interview and survey questions.

I personally gave an appeal on several different occasions to the members of the Big Buddies afterschool program at Central Elementary explaining details of the study and the time requirement of a voluntary phone interview. Due to a less than expected of letters taken by participants at the Central program, I also visited an identical program at Longfellow Elementary, a school with a similar student demographic, on the other side of Sidney. A visit was also made to First Presbyterian Church of Sidney, which is within one block of Central Elementary to speak with their mentors prior to the start of their afterschool program on one occasion and also passed out interview requests at the end of year party for mentees and their families.

All of the above contacts were made during the early part of the month of May so that a full year's experience would be able to be considered by the mentors. Another consideration for the early May distribution of requests was the mid-May conclusion of all three programs.



## Population of study

### Participants in all programs

Between all three mentoring programs at Central Elementary there are 154 participating mentors. 72% of those participants are female to 28% male.

Table 1:

Division by sex general age grouping per program:

<i>Program</i>	<i>Total members</i>	<i>%female</i>	<i>%male</i>	<i>%adults</i>	<i>%students</i>
TEAMS program:	90 total mentors.	69%female	31% male	90% adult	10%student
Central Zone:	23 total mentors.	70% female	30% male	52% adult	48%student
Big Buddies:	41 total mentors.	78% female	22% male		100% student

### Delimitations and limitations

Race: Beyond the control of the researcher is the fact that 100% of the mentors involved in this program are caucasian individuals.

Age ratio by program: Matched samples were unable to be achieved due to the wide range in student to adult ratios.

### Population of this study

Table 2

. Demographic Information for interview subjects

<i>Item</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Gender	Male	7	39
	Female	11	61
Employment status	Employed adult	1	6

	Retired adult	12	67
	Teen student	5	28
<hr/>			
Employment experience	Accountant	2	15
current or past (percent-	Bus Driver*	1	8
ages based on adults only)	computers/communications	1	8
	court administrator	1	8
	manufacturing	1	8
	physician	1	8
	teacher	2	15**
	teacher's aide/secretary	1	8**
	receptionist*	1	8
	warehouseman	1	8
<hr/>			
Religious affiliation	Brethren	1	6
(as identified by subject)	Catholic	6	33
	Catholic/Methodist	1	6
Christian or born again Christian		3	17
Lutheran		3	17
Methodist		1	6
Mormon		1	6
No affiliation		2	11
<hr/>			
Number of children	no children	0	0

(of adult mentors)	1 child	2	15
	2 children	4	30
	3 children	3	23
	4 children	2	15
	5 or more children	1	8

\*The subject who was a bus driver worked for the county board of MRDD (Mentally Retarded and Developmentally Delayed). The subject who worked as a receptionist worked for Job and Family Services. Both the interview subjects will be considered to have been employed in activities having to do with children.

\*\*Total of subjects having been employed in some way working with children 28%

Interviews were conducted by phone and were targeted by the author to coincide with the times listed as best by the mentors on their request form. Participants were asked if they would consent to the conversation being recorded, to which all replied favorably. In addition to the audio recording the author took notes on the back of the interview request form for each individual. All interviews were completed within 3 months of the end of the school year. Interviews were then transcribed, making sure to accurately match demographic data with responses.

**Methods of data analysis**

After transcription the author then read through all responses to one interview question at a time looking for repeated themes, ideas, and specific statements for both the adults in the TEAMS program and also for the teen volunteers in the Big Buddies program. For each question different themes emerged and were repeated among the answers of mentors. These themes were then compiled into groups.

I came up with implications and suggestions based on mentor responses as well as

my own personal knowledge of the programs, previous research, and my own experiences and opinions as an educator.

## Chapter 4

### Qualitative Analysis

This study analyzed the motivations, perceptions and experiences of mentors in an elementary school setting. Mentors were from three separate groups: an in-school program of adult volunteers, and an after-school program comprised of high school volunteers. Participants were asked questions regarding why they volunteered, what they felt the greatest needs of the children in the program were, what their greatest success was, to what degree they felt the children benefited, if they had any frustrations, what the best part of the program was, and if they had any suggestions for improvement. In order to represent the perspectives of the participants, data will be presented by theme. For each theme, I will indicate how many participants commented on the topic and then attach a few representative samples of the comments. In this way, the data gives a sense of the way that the participants spoke about the themes, using the authentic language of the participants.

TABLE 3

Results of content analysis for mentor interviews

Five themes emerged from the responses to the question, "Why did you become involved in the TEAMS or Big Buddies program?" Several mentors mentioned different motivations.

Theme	Number of comments	Sample Comments
Wanted to volunteer	2	"Number one I wanted to volunteer for something. When they told me about the program I thought it sounded like a good

program so I thought I'd join it and find

out."

Recommendation or  
recruitment by family  
or friends 5

"My sister had been in it a year previously  
and I felt it was a good way to help out the  
kids."

"(The director) is my sister in law so she  
said you'll be on TEAMS right?"

"Friends of our were doing it and she said  
you'd probably like, and so I did it."

Retired teacher or  
school worker wanting  
to be involved again 3

"Well I was a newly retired teacher and I  
felt like it was a good way to help out with  
the kids."

"I'm a retired teacher. I ran into a friend  
who was in the program who said it was a  
really good use of time: anything they could  
so to help kids. I liked the fact that it was  
one on one. It was something that I could do

for the community since I wasn't working anymore."

Wanted to help kids 7

"So when I retired I figured that would be a good way to become involved with kids and help somebody"

"I just really like working with children and some of them really need the one on one and a little support and encouragement"

Giving back what was received in the past 1

"My reasoning was, at that age, I did not read well and when I got into junior high and I met Mr. Abbott at Houston, he mentored me and helped me enjoy reading and I wanted to help other kids do that. He got me to read the first book I ever read clear through."

Family experience 2

"Mainly my granddaughter. She was in the TEAMS program when she was down there at Central and it helped her an awful lot. She's now gonna be in 7th grade and she's

gone beyond my expectations."

"Probably because I have an Autistic grandson...I knew how important the one to one was, especially with reading...So when I heard about this I thought there's other children, they're not Autistic, but they have a disability in the sense they're having trouble learning to read, and I thought I'd like to do that."

Four themes emerged in mentors responses to the question, "What did you feel were the greatest needs of the kids that were selected for this program?"

Theme	Number of comments	Sample Comments
Academic needs	8	"It seemed to run by age...many of them had no exposure to reading upon coming to school and you could tell right away those who had adults who had read to them in the past or had some kind of a program versus those who hadn't."

"There were some who didn't read too well."



"Well I think they obviously needed help with their reading and writing and spelling."

Relationship and attention

9

"They needed someone to talk with and be with other than someone in their family."

"Just someone to show that they really care The friendship and someone being alongside them."

"Encouragement. An adult who understood what they were going through and were sympathetic to that and were encouraging."

Self-esteem & confidence

4

"Being someone to give them positive strokes, 'you can do this', 'you can succeed' those kinds of things for them to build on."

"They needed someone telling them 'You're doing a great job, keep it up'."

Better guidance at home	3	"Probably the interaction with an adult that might have the opportunity to keep the kids grounded and give them a little sense of stability. You sense that they really struggle with the home life."  "Stable home life."
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In response to the question "What degree of benefit of benefit do you feel your mentee achieved in working with you?" many mentors responded in terms of general growth and improvement but others spoke of improvement to academics as well as social benefits and self confidence. Several mentors spoke of limited benefits to the children they worked with and gave specific reasons as to that lesser benefit.

Theme	Number of comments	Sample Comments
General improvement	8	"I thought it's a great benefit. I thought it was exciting to see the differences in the kids from the fall to the spring. Some of them did really well."  "He seemed more willing by the end of they year to stick with things, he didn't always seem to just want to get out. He also seemed more inclined to be interested in different kids of knowledge."

"No doubt there was great benefit. You could just see it at the end of the year. It was day and night."

Academic improvement 5

"I think they got a great deal out of it, ... academically."

"I think when we started out we were doing books that were like 2.8 and when we were done we were in the 5's by the time we were finished by the end of the year."

Improvement in social skills and self confidence 2

"I think they got a great deal out of it... probably even more so socially in relationships."

"Well, just the one on one attention and that he got to share things."

Limited benefit 4

"Depends. Some of the younger ones couldn't pay attention. Older kids could

pay attention and learned a lot."

"I could see some improvement, but I saw some up and down time during the year.

One of them would open up and say...his mom and dad had a fight and they hit each other and they hit him, so it's like he had his ups and downs, so you know a moderate benefit is probably a fair answer."

Four themes emerged from respondents from the question, "What did you feel was your greatest success with your mentee?" Academic growth received the most comments, yet improved communication skills, self-esteem and confidence, and friendship with mentees were also strong responses among mentors

Theme	Number of comments	Sample Comments
Academic growth	10	"Getting them focusing on what they were supposed to be doing, the reading and the other tasks."  "Improving the reading skills, and math skill, and communication skills."

Improved communication skills 4

"Probably just the ability to have them open up and discuss things that may be bothering them."

"Getting to know a strange person and trusting them with things. A complete stranger in their lives and getting to know them and they just pour their heart out."

Improved self-esteem and confidence 4

"I think improving their self-esteem in this case. If you improve their self-esteem then their academics will follow suit and they're more able to do what they're capable of doing."

"The one little boy I would say his self-esteem and his ability to read. When he first came he would say I'm stupid or whatever, and by the last couple of times I was there he was so ready to read, and so ready to take those tests, and so excited about

getting a 100, that I felt that was the largest accomplishment.

"Probably the greatest advantage is when you know someone is confident in you that has to increase your confidence."

Friendship

3

"Probably the friendship. That they felt safe. In the midst of teaching them they had a sense of comfort, being able to share. I was positive. I was an encourager. And I think that was what I noticed."

"This year I formed an especially close friendship with my little buddy."

In responding to what they believed to be the best part of the programs they were involved in mentors answered the question "What was the best part of the program?" to a wide degree of variety. Answers included community involvement, academic improvement for mentees, relational rewards, the overall strength of the programs, and the activities they completed with their mentee.

Theme	Number of comments	Sample Comments
Community involvement	3	<p>"I think the ability to bring people in from the community that somewhat have experience, and not only in education but in life and are able to relate to their family structure."</p> <p>"It made me feel like I was giving back to the community by helping."</p>
Academic improvement	4	<p>"I think the best part is the reading and adding additional information."</p> <p>"I think watching the progress of the kids."</p> <p>"Watching those kids go from a student who could barely read to one that could read, and know what they were reading too. I had several students I got that were on a first grade level, they were in third grade, and they were able to move up to</p>

		third grade, and then to fourth."
Relational rewards	6	"They'd get their own rewards with smiles and thank-yous and they'd just get to know you. That was rewarding in itself, it's the relationship thing."  "The smile you get when they see you and they come and hug you (laughs) I guess you get something back too. Just to see them grow. Seeing them go from kind of like, I don't really want to be here to being more excited about it or about whatever you're doing."
		"Seeing their faces light up and smile and how appreciative they are of all the help you're giving them."
Strength of the program	2	"I think the way they had it set up was very good. You knew exactly what you were doing."



Volunteering you don't know what you're doing, but I think it was set up very well."

"I thought the program went very well. Knowing that these kids, if they're not given more, they're just going to be lost in the system."

Activities

3

"I really like that they try to have a topic to teach the kids something. It's good that they're having a purpose or something that they are trying to achieve at each session."

"What changes or improvements would you make to the program?" Suggestions among adult mentors included no improvement necessary, too much academic work required during the mentoring time, too short of a time period, and a hope that the cancelled program would continue somewhere in some fashion. Comments from teens involved in the Big Buddies program included a perceived need for more advisors to run the program, more exercise at the beginning to help kids get out the 'jitters', having teen volunteers be less concerned about socializing among themselves, and several with no suggestions.

Theme	Number of comments	Sample Comments
Time too short	4	<p>"They try to fit too much into a half an hour."</p> <p>"I would say sometimes I was frustrated with the timing of it. We didn't have a lot of time. We only have a half an hour and sometime it would be five or six minute before you'd get started with somebody and that made it harder to get done what you wanted to get done."</p>
Too much academic	2	<p>"Sometimes the kids would want to talk a little bit before they'd start but the minute they'd get there it was work, work, work, work."</p>
Continue the program	2	<p>"I wish they would have kept it first of all. Secondly, that they would continue to do this in the school."</p> <p>"It's really, really disheartening that it's going away. I felt like it was a</p>

valuable service to the kids at a very low cost in the economic time and I don't feel the tradeoff was worth it."

No changes or improvements 5

"No, I just loved the program."

"How could there be a downside?"

Random comments 3

"I think with the number of students it would be helpful to have a handful of advisors there to run the program"

"It seems to me that a lot of the other teens involved in mentoring were not concerned enough with the kids.

They were more concerned with talking to each other."

### Summary

This study allowed mentors to voice their perceptions of and opinions on working with elementary students in a one-on-one mentoring capacity. Mentors got involved in the program under two main auspices: wanting to help children and following in the footsteps of friends or relatives who were involved in the program. Regarding the most pressing needs of the students they worked with mentors spoke most frequently of academic needs as well as the social and relational needs of their mentees. Mentors saw

the greatest successes with their mentees in regards to their academic and social/emotional growth over the course of the school year. Overall highlights of the program spoken of by mentors focused on the growth of students, the friendships they formed with students and the chance to be involved in giving back to the community. Thoughts on changes to the program were minimal as most mentors thought the program was fantastic the way it was. Those who made suggestions focused on keeping a program like it going since Central Elementary would be closing. Other comments included wanting to have more time with the kids and less work to do during the allotted time.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Implications

The focus of this study was to discover mentors' thoughts on their experiences in mentoring programs with elementary children. In this section the emergent themes from mentors' answers for each question will be analyzed and detailed. Practical applications and suggestions for building new programs and for improving existing programs will be made from this information.

#### **Why did you become a mentor?**

**Wanting to volunteer.** Several participants in the program mentioned that a general desire to volunteer for something that would benefit the community drove them to become involved in the mentoring program. Civic minded people looking for an outlet of service may be drawn to opportunities to work with local children who are in need of extra help. Finding such individuals could be achieved by recruiting through civic organizations engaged in the local community.

**Knowing someone already mentoring in the program.** A significant portion of mentors in this study became mentors because of some kind of interaction with family or friends that convinced them of the benefits of the program. Firsthand accounts of individuals who were already working in the program proved effective in bringing others into the program. Several teens involved in the program noted an older sibling who had been positively involved as a motivation. Another related that having a much younger sibling gave them experience with and a desire for working with children.

**Knowing a child who benefited.** Others volunteered because they personally knew a child who benefited greatly from individual work with a caring adult. In both these instances the volunteer was a grandparent whose grandchild benefited from such

programs. One specific mentor had a granddaughter who was involved in the TEAMS program and made amazing strides that she credited to the program. Another mentor witnessed their disabled grandchild's benefit of the one on one attention and instruction in a similar program and decided to try to give that help to any child she possibly could through the program.

**Retirement** Findings also indicated that the majority of the program participants interviewed were retired individuals. The involvement of these volunteers was therefore not tied to work schedules or an overabundance of outside commitments. Several of the retired volunteers had once been teachers and still wanted a way to be involved in education. Such an opportunity allowed them to be involved with the more positive aspects of education that they missed such as reading with children and working in a one on one situation without having to grade papers, deal with discipline, and prepare for state testing along with other negative aspect of a full time teaching job.

**Working with children** Other volunteers merely expressed a desire to work with children. One expressed that the long distance nature of their "grandparenting" left them wanting more interaction with kids and that the TEAMS program gave them that.

**Personal experience** One mentor's desire to give back part of what was given to him as a child strikes a chord of reciprocity that can be a powerful and successful motivating factor. Three other points of interest regarding this mentor are they were the only mentor interviewed in this study who did not have education beyond a high school diploma, was the only interviewed subject to work a blue collar job, and that their spouse was a current employee of the school.

Another finding regarding current or past employment shows a majority of mentors with current or past professions that required education above that of a high

school diploma. This finding reinforces the findings of Calderella et.al. (2010) that a large majority of volunteers have secondary education.

Analysis also shows all but two mentors as listing a religious faith with over half claiming Catholicism or the Lutheran faith. Other faiths represented in equal degrees were Brethren, Christian, Methodist, and Mormon. A 1999 study by Wilson & Musick also found strong participation from religious groups.

Findings of this study revealed that among adult mentors the split between male and female only slightly favored females, while among teen volunteers an 80% majority were female.

### **Implications and suggestions**

Being able to attract new people on an ongoing basis will be critical to starting and maintaining any mentoring program. The analysis here of the motivations of mentors in the programs as well as the existing groups and professions they come from provides information on what currently works and should continue to be taken advantage of in recruiting mentors as well as areas that are lacking and can could use attention.

Recommendations of family and friends were shown here to be an excellent recruitment tool. Because of this, current members of the program would make excellent recruiters. Equipping current mentors with literature on the program and encouraging them to talk to friends and relatives would likely prove beneficial. Selecting involved teens to go into their schools could also prove beneficial but may require more scrutiny in picking the right volunteers to do so. Teens who could possibly spark an interest in others, particularly younger siblings, could be instrumental in bringing in the next wave of volunteers.

Recruitment among individuals retired from a career has been very successful in

this program. Of the retired people involved in TEAMS many came to their knowledge of the program either because they were leaving a career in the school system and already knew of the program or because they wanted an opportunity to serve and knew someone involved in the program, which led to their involvement. Many other valuable contributors remain untapped that could be reached through new methods of active recruitment. Existing research verifies that retired individuals provide an excellent source for mentors this source should continue to be pursued. This could be accomplished by going to businesses where some of the current mentors finished careers and presenting the mentoring opportunity to other individuals who are at or approaching retirement would spread the word of the program to more potential mentors than just a word of mouth campaign or waiting on people to seek it out.

The prevalence of adult individuals in the mentoring program with a higher level of education suggests both continued and expanded recruitment for such individuals as well as possible added recruitment for new mentors with less education.

Weaknesses of the program include the facts that very few volunteers were between the ages of high school and retirement and that only one mentor interviewed was employed in a working class job. Particularly with older students from working class families, having a mentor that understands their background may help form a bond of friendship that could be foundational to a successful mentoring experience. Active recruitment at local businesses may be able to unearth individuals who would be willing to participate in a mentoring program.

Another potential area for finding mentors for a program is to look for individuals with a relative or friend who has benefitted from programs where one on one attention has made a great difference in overcoming a disability or correcting some deficit. Such



individuals may wish to be part of such a program themselves in order to make such a difference in a life themselves. Finding such individuals would require active searching on the part of the program director. By speaking with guidance counselors, teachers, and administrators from higher grade levels within the district or region the director may be able to target certain students who have made great strides in their academic performance or social interactions thanks to the efforts of a mentor, tutor or other such individual. These students themselves could potentially be effective mentors for younger children as they have a firsthand knowledge of what types of interventions worked for them. They would also be excellent role models for struggling younger students to look up to in regards to work ethic and successful outcomes. Mentees could see through these students that they too can achieve and be successful. Parents or relatives of particularly successful students could also be recruited through personal contact, a phone call or letter.

Finding civically minded individuals who wish to be of help to the community could be achieved through working with local organizations such the United Way and YMCA. By working with these groups, a new pool of possible volunteers could be reached.

**What degree of benefit do you feel your mentee achieved in working with you?**

**General improvement & change** In almost any endeavor people are involved in, seeing growth, change, or progress is an important element in feeling successful and wanting to continue. While there are specific areas of change that mentors made reference to, the observance of a general overall change was expressed most often. Many mentors made no mention of specific areas in which their mentee(s) made gains, yet they were excited by their view that the child made great progress over the course of their involvement.

**Academic improvement** A number of mentors elaborated further on the general improvement that their mentees made by referring to the academic progress achieved. There was very little mention of specifics by mentors who referred to academic progress. Although one referred to specific gains made by a student in the area of reading level. This mentor was a retired teacher. So while mentors were aware of academic improvement, there were very few specifics given.

**Improved confidence and social skills** Several mentors mentioned the relationships that were developed with their mentor and the confidence the students gained in their communication and relational skills over time. Limited benefit A perception of limited benefit to students was attributed by some mentors to a number of reasons. One mentioned that the younger students were not able to pay attention as well as the older students and thereby got less out of it. Another cited ups and downs over the course of the year due to difficulties at home that were shared by their mentee.

### **Implications and suggestions**

The data suggests that checking in with mentors on a regular basis and evaluating their perception of success with their student(s) is of great importance. By checking in regularly, the coordinator can give help or suggestions to the mentor on how to approach their student in a different way or perhaps provide them with new materials for working with their student.

In order to have mentors see that their work is resulting in an academic improvement, some kind of assessment will be important. Having mentors give assessments to their students themselves will enable them to see mentee progress firsthand. Having mentors give short assessments testing the same skills at regular intervals will give the mentors a chance to see growth and be a cheerleader for their

mentee.

Self confidence is a skill that can definitely be coached and mentors need some training in how to build kids up both when they are doing well and struggling. Evidence also indicates the value of developing self confidence in their students, both for the tutor and the mentee. This is one of the greatest areas of potential benefit that mentors can provide for the students that they work with. Mentors have a unique opportunity to give direct praise and immediate feedback to the students that they are working with. It is very difficult for a classroom teacher with 25 students under their instruction to give immediate feedback to every student or be able to interact one on one with them for a prolonged period of time on a regular basis. A mentoring or tutoring program can be a unique approach to doing this and can reach a large number of students. Teaching mentors what to say, how to say it, and when to say it may seem unnecessary, but it cannot be forgotten that many of these mentors have no background in education. Offering some tips and suggestions for mentors on building their mentee's self confidence, especially when the mentee is struggling, would be of great benefit. Looking at before and after numbers cannot show things such as the confidence and attitude with which the student tackled a task, nor the speed with which they completed it. These elements do not show up on paper but are critical elements to student success.

Mentors who spoke of limited benefit did not seem overly put off by it, yet keeping track of the mentor mentee relationships where a lack of progress is perceived by the mentor would be advisable. Mentors having continual feelings like this could become discouraged with the program and quit. Mentors should be encouraged from the outset to express any frustrations or difficulties in their mentoring relationships with other mentors and with the program director. Suggestions may be given in these cases or a change of

mentee assignment may be needed. A relationship that does not “click” is not a failure on the part of either the mentee or the mentor and the director should always check for relationships that are not working and be open to the possibility of a change.

**What did you feel was your greatest success with your mentee? How did this meet their greatest needs?**

**Academic growth** Academic growth was mentioned the most by mentors as their greatest success. This is not surprising as it was the main goal of the program. Referrals were made by classroom teachers based on primarily academic needs. Mentors spoke of the gains made from the one on one attention given to students. Also mentioned was the additional focus that mentors were able to provide their mentees as they worked through the materials that were given to them.

**Improved communication skills** Mentors expressed pleasure in the personal relationships that they were able to forge with their mentees. Sharing occurred between mentor and mentee where students opened up and talked about personal stories and feelings. In several cases, mentors were able to listen in a safe and personal setting as students shared things that were bothering them.

**Improved self-esteem and confidence** The role of encourager and coach was a powerful one embraced by many mentors. They shared stories about their opportunity to provide immediate positive feedback to students while they worked and to turn negative self-talk in their mentees into positivity and confidence.

**Friendship** Several mentors mentioned the friendship that they were able to form with their mentee over the course of the year.

### **Implications and suggestions**

A strengthening of these academic gains could be magnified by proactively

encouraging interaction between the mentors and the teachers of the students they are involved with. While the program coordinator is directly in charge of the academic work mentors are supposed to do with their mentees, the classroom teachers have a greater understanding of the ongoing needs of each individual student. Finding time for interaction like this is a challenge during the school day as schedules are not planned accordingly, but lines of communication could be developed between mentors and teachers. Perhaps once a month a short meeting could be held where all mentors and teachers could meet and informally talk about student progress and needs. Relevant information on students could be exchanged between parties that would be beneficial to both the mentors and the teachers. This information would then in turn need to be given to the program coordinator so that more specifically tailored lessons could be developed for students. Mentors and teachers would also be able to communicate to their mentee/student that they regularly discuss their progress with the other. This would help students to see that there is a real connection between the work they do in the classroom and the work they do with their mentor and that they are not two different worlds. If such a meeting is just not possible, an e-mail relationship is another way that classroom teachers and mentors could keep each other informed of what is going on with the student(s) that they share interaction with. Suggestions would need to be sent to the program director so that appropriate changes could be made in planning.

Mentors in several cases were able to act in a way resembling a guidance counselor as students shared personal stories and feelings. Cases such as these offer a unique opportunity but must also have some safeguards in place. Mentors acting under the direct supervision of a school may fall under state requirements regarding the reporting of abuse. Each program should be aware of any applicable laws and make their

mentors aware of any legal requirements they may have should students share stories of abuse or neglect. Lines of communication here between guidance counselors, teachers, administrators, and mentors should be open. While mentors have a unique relationship with their mentees in regards to open communication that differs from that the mentees have with their teacher, principal, or parents, guidelines should be established for mentors on how to proceed in such a relationship.

The role of cheerleader and coach is one of the greatest potential roles that a mentor can have. It separates them from classroom teachers and even parents in that they are an outside person who is able to encourage, nurture, and correct in a way that is different from the aforementioned relationships. Yet, those who sign up to become mentors do not necessarily have innate skills regarding these opportunities. Training should be provided to mentors on appropriate ways to encourage and correct students as well as specific strategies on how to deal with student negativity and self-doubt. Such training would bolster an already strong opportunity that mentors have with their mentees. School guidance counselors could be involved in helping mentors gain extra knowledge and confidence in dealing with their mentees.

Date suggests that long-term tutor-mentor relationships are beneficial. Productive mentor-mentee pairing should be maintained as much as possible. For those students who are remaining at the same school for the next year an effort should be made by coordinators to keep them with their mentor from the previous year if possible. When students move from building to building either within a school year or after their time at a building is done it may be worth asking their mentor if they would wish to give part of their time somewhere else in order to maintain the relationship they developed with the mentee. Care would need to be taken in such a situation by individual building

coordinators so as not to lose the volunteer time of specific mentors.

### **What was the best part of the program?**

**Community involvement** Utilizing community members to share their time, experience, and knowledge was talked about by several mentors as being a key factor in the entire program. Giving back to the community and particularly to children was seen as important by these mentors.

**Academic improvement** Mentors spoke of being able to see students do things at the end of the year that they couldn't do at the beginning of the year as the best part of the program. Progress was a key word used by mentors answering this question.

**Relational Rewards** Mentors spoke of the relationships they developed with their mentees. The conversations, hugs, and smiles that were exchanged between mentors and mentees were very meaningful to the adult volunteers.

### **Implications and suggestions**

Community service organizations could be used as a recruitment tool for finding people who are interested in being involved in building into their communities, especially if any of the organizations or the individuals are more child centered.

The data indicates a connection between teachers and mentors regarding academic growth would be very valuable. By the end of the year classroom teachers have plenty of data ranging from report cards to norm and criterion referenced assessments that can show the growth of individual students. Sharing this information with mentors would be a valuable tool in showing how students had progressed in all areas, especially those beyond the mentoring time.

These relationships are very different from the other relationships these children have in the majority of the rest of their lives. A student can have a good relationship with

their teacher, but it is still a relationship involving more authority and direction of the child in a structured setting. Relationships with parents can also have stresses and complications, especially in situations where joint custody is shared among divorced parents or in situations where there is negative parent- child interaction. In the mentoring relationship, the child has a caring adult to work and talk with, who, although they are still directing them, is involved with them in a less authoritative manner and thereby becomes involved in a more friend-like manner. Research by Allen & Poteet (1999) showed that open communication, trust, and clearly defined expectation were critical to the overall success of their relationships. Comments from mentors in this study further support the importance of the relational aspect of the mentor-student relationship. Continuation of these relationships during the summer and after children have left the program would be one that would require careful consideration of the law and the well-being and privacy of both parties. Structured and supervised events could be set up at local parks, recreation centers , or community centers to give mentors and mentees the opportunity to maintain their friendship. Research strongly suggests that longer relationships have a greater benefit to mentees (Hancock, 2003;Chan & Ho, 2005;Keller & Pryce, 2012) so attempting to continue relationships from year to year in the program and to possibly keep relationships going after the child has left the program would be a beneficial endeavor.

**What improvements or changes do you think should be made to the program?**

**None** Most surveyed mentors responded that they thought the program was well run and could not think of any changes that should be made.

**Not enough time** The shortness of their time with their mentees was the most common complaint among mentors. Some commented that students were often late



getting from their classroom to the assigned program area. In almost all cases students were sent out of their classrooms for their time with their mentors by their classroom teachers. Inevitably teachers would occasionally forget the time while being involved in instruction. The time spent waiting and then calling to the appropriate classroom to have the student released and then waiting for them to arrive would eat considerably into the scheduled time. Another time related complaint was that of having too much academic work to complete, not allowing for enough interaction time.

Several of the teens involved with the Big Brothers Big Sisters program who took part in the survey mentioned that other teens involved in the program were more concerned with visiting with their same age friends than in working with their young mentees.

**Continue the program** At the beginning of this research study the TEAMS program at Central Elementary found out that it would be in its final year due to the closing of Central Elementary at the conclusion of the school year. The closing of the building was decided upon by the Sidney City Schools board of education due to several different factors. An extremely tight budget as a result of decreased local revenues including the failure of several recent school levies, the increasing demands of maintaining an ageing building (approaching 90 years old), and a desire to reorganize the structuring of the district all contributed to the decision. Numerous mentors expressed their sadness at these decisions and real worry that the program's end would prove detrimental to students in the long run.

### **Implications and suggestions**

Since data indicates the need for more tutoring time, the following changes are suggested as ways to address this problem. A possible solution to the problem of late

student arrival could be to overlap the times when students are scheduled to come down by a short period, perhaps five minutes. In doing this, any delay time could be minimized and greater efficiency of the mentoring time could be achieved. Of course in order to account for students being on time and therefore early in such a setup, a means of keeping them occupied during any time they may have to wait would be necessary. Possibilities for this could include having a computer activity set up and ready to go for early arrivers or another kind of activity that would keep them occupied and engaged while waiting. Students could even have nametags placed on a table with any book or paper that they would be doing that day with their mentor so that they could get a look at it while they were waiting.

A clearer message of purpose for the teens involved may be needed in order to address this problem. Further steps may have to include separating certain mentors to different locations within the club area or perhaps to different times of service or different building running the same program.

In order to start or maintain an elementary mentoring program, coordinators may wish to consider finding alternative sources of funding for their program including applying for and writing grants and requesting state, federal, and local aid when and where possible. Mentors who are involved in the schools also tend to be positive voters when it comes time for school levies and need to be appealed to for the support of the school district when elections come.

### **Strengths of the study**

While a great deal of research exists on afterschool and mentoring programs directed toward at risk teens, very few existing studies examine the perceptions of mentors involved with elementary age students, particularly in school programs. This

study looks at involved adults and teens in an elementary school setting and goes beyond just demographics by polling these volunteers for their take on the work that they are doing.

### **Limitations of the study**

**Remaining threats to internal validity** The purpose of this study was to look at the perceptions of individuals involved in three different mentoring programs, the TEAMS program held during school hours at Central Elementary School, the Big Buddies program run by the Big Brother Big Sisters organization, and the afterschool program operated at the nearby Presbyterian Church. Research request forms were handed out to TEAMS mentors by the program director while an oral presentation was made and forms were handed out to the teens in the Big Buddies program and to volunteers at the local church by the researcher himself. There were many respondents from the TEAMS program, 6 respondents from the teens involved in the Big Buddies Program, but no respondents from those involved in the afterschool program at the Presbyterian Church thus, this study is limited by the limited number of respondents from only two programs. The point of views that would be represented in large cities or small rural towns are also not present in this study.

**Remaining threats to external validity** The parameters of the non-teen respondents were limited to mainly retired individuals with only one exception. This does not adequately cover the wide spectrum of those who volunteer are on a national level.

### **Suggestions for further research**

This study could be improved by expanding the number of participants and programs. While this study ended up focusing on mainly retired individuals and teens, comparing these findings with those interviewing people involved in a work release for

mentoring situation could provide an interesting other perspective to this data set. People still involved in the workforce who were giving their off time would also give a more rounded set of data.

Future research of similar programs at private schools should also be studied as the motivating factors and reactions to their service may differ significantly. While this study took place at a school with a high level of poverty, study is also needed at schools where students come from a more affluent background in order to look at differences in the approach and response to mentoring in a different demographic.

This study only focused on mentor's perceptions of the mentoring relationship based on self report. A critical component to the success of these relationships is that of the student mentee. Additional research is needed in this area to ascertain the feelings of younger students involved in such programs. Additional research using observations of tutor-mentee interactions would also add validity to the study. Combining research done on both mentors and mentees would lead to powerful implications and suggestions for how to refine and shape mentoring to be the best it can possibly be.

### **Biblical Integration**

Children were clearly special in the eyes of Jesus. In Luke 18:16 Jesus said "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Luke 9: 47-48 says "Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.'" From Jesus' love for children there is a great deal to learn. They are an example of innocence, potential, and much of what is good in this world. Jesus, in fact, spoke of the spirit of a child in relation to obtaining salvation when he said in Matthew 18:2-3 "And

Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Scripture also clearly speaks of our responsibilities to raise children and point them in the right direction in life. It is the responsibility of parents, teachers and elders to guide our children, correct them and teach them. Proverbs 22:6 states, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it”. Those of us who are in a position to teach and train children are held to a high standard by God. “We who teach will be judged more strictly.” (James 3:1).

Guiding children is serious business in God’s eyes and mentoring is a worthy enterprise deserving of attention. Titus 2:3-4 speaks of older women training the younger women using God’s Word and their own experiences. This principle can be applied to adults and even teens in regard to coming alongside young children and teaching them all manner of things.

Adult guidance of children is an important aspect to the Christian faith and needs to be handled with passion and care.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH REQUEST LETTER

Mentoring Research Study Request

Dear Central Elementary student mentor,

My name is Aaron Berning and I am a second grade teacher at Central Elementary. I am currently working on a thesis research project for my Master's degree. For this project I will be looking into the motivations, perceptions, opinions, and suggestions of people currently involved in a mentoring relationship with an elementary age student. Through my research I hope to gather information that will make the mentoring experience an even better one for everyone involved.

Here's where you come in. You have been randomly selected as a possible participant for this study. The study will involve answering a short 7 item questionnaire of multiple choice or very short answer questions regarding basic information about you. I will also then be calling you and doing a short 10-15 minute interview. I will ask questions about your reasons for becoming a mentor, your feelings and thoughts about the needs of the student(s) you mentor, your opinion of how the student(s) has benefited from your relationship, and your thoughts about the program you are involved in. ***Your participation will be totally confidential. No member of the school's staff or any supervisor of the mentoring program will know who has actually participated in this study. If at any point in the interview process you are uncomfortable or wish to stop for any reason your participation can come to an immediate end.***

I will then be studying the responses of all participants in the survey and looking for similar responses and ideas given by participants. Any meaningful patterns will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the entire program, look for ways that mentors are experiencing the greatest success, and how students can be reached in even more effective ways.

If you would like to participate in this study please fill out the information below as well as the survey questions on the back and return it in the attached envelope as soon as possible. If you have any questions please feel free to call me or leave a voicemail at (937) 479-5771 on evenings or weekends.

Thank you,

Aaron Berning

Yes, I would like to take part in the mentoring study

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SIGNATURE

What days and times would be *best* to contact you by phone for the 10-15 minute interview?

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APPENDIX B

MENTOR INTERVIEW AND SURVEY QUESTIONS.

1. What was your motivation/reason for becoming a mentor in the TEAMS or Central Zone or Big Buddies program?
2. What do you feel are the greatest needs of the children who have been selected for this program? Do you feel your specific mentee(s) were a good match based on this criteria?
3. What degree of benefit do you feel your mentee achieved in working with you this year?  
a. no benefit   b. a little benefit   c. moderate benefit   d. great benefit
4. What do you feel have been your greatest successes (if any) with your mentee(s)?
5. What are your greatest areas of disappointment or frustration (if any) with your mentee(s)?
6. What is/are the best part(s) of this program?
7. What part(s) of this program need improvement? What changes would you make?

*Survey*

The following demographic survey will be given to all selected participants.

Please take a few moments to complete the demographic questionnaire below before mailing. Thank you for your willingness and time.

1. Male   Female
2. Which life category best defines you? a. student   b. currently employed   c. retired
3. If currently employed or retired which job/career was your main employment? *open*
4. What is your marital status? a. single   b. married   c. divorced   d. other
5. If you have any children please list how many. Please mark N/A if you have no children. \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your religious background. Please write down a denomination or N/A if none.  
\_\_\_\_\_