

# Volunteers Supporting Children With Reading Difficulties in Schools: Motives and Rewards

*Danielle Tracey, Samantha Hornery, Marjorie Seaton, Rhonda G. Craven, and Alexander Seeshing Yeung*

## Abstract

Research on volunteer mentor programs has demonstrated mostly positive outcomes for mentees. As a result, many schools seek to attract and retain volunteers to assist children in need of support. The researchers interviewed 26 adult volunteers (from Australian companies) who help children with reading difficulties and examined intervention effects on the *mentors* as well as their motives for participating. The researchers found three significant factors that motivated corporate volunteers to engage in mentoring activities: values, understanding, and enhancement. In working individually with children in need of help, the mentors recognized the significance of their mentor role (values). For successful implementation of the program, mentors needed to learn new skills and use them with the mentees (understanding). The interaction between the adult and the child facilitated growth and development for both mentor and mentee (enhancement). To benefit both mentors and mentees, these critical factors should be considered by schools to successfully attract and engage volunteers in mentor programs with a specific educational focus.

Keywords: volunteers, mentors, reading, intervention, literacy, Australia

## Introduction

The origins of mentoring can be traced as far back as 800 BC (Appelbaum, Ritchie, & Shapiro, 1994; Dondero, 1997; Garvey & Alred, 2003), when in

Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus was leaving for the Trojan War and entrusted the care and advising of his son, Telemachus, to his friend, Mentor (Dondero, 1997; Grassinger, Porath, & Ziegler, 2010; Hegstad, 1999). However, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that interest in the process of mentoring began to blossom (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, 2008; Colley, 2001; Garvey & Alred, 2003; Grassinger et al., 2010), and this interest has grown exponentially since the 1970s (Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2009; Wilson, 2001). Although there is considerable debate about what constitutes mentoring (Gibb, 1994), due in part to the different contexts in which mentoring occurs (e.g., organizational, educational), a particularly salient definition for the present investigation was proposed by Grassinger et al. (2010). Drawing from business and educational literatures, these authors identified the elements common to all definitions and so characterized mentoring as a:

...relatively chronologically stable dyadic relationship between an experienced mentor and a less experienced...mentee, characterized by mutual trust and benevolence, with the purpose of promoting learning, development, and ultimately progress in the mentee. (Grassinger et al., 2010, p. 30)

Initially used in large organizations to support the development of junior staff and transmit organizational culture (Chao, 2009), mentoring has been increasingly adopted in the educational system, where it has become understood as a panacea for a variety of educational challenges (Meijers, 2008). There is a substantial and diverse body of literature concerning mentoring that spans a wide range of disciplines, including psychology, organizational behavior, education, sociology, and social work (Black, Suarez, & Medina, 2004; Eby & Allen, 2008; Wilson, 2001). Mentoring programs are popular in the USA, the UK, and Australia, particularly programs that involve volunteering by members of businesses and organizations. Corporate volunteers have been particularly active in mentoring programs for children and youth struggling within the educational system. For example, in Australia, a well-known multinational corporation has established a foundation to enhance the literacy skills of children at risk of failing to read (Slator & Goddard, 2012). However, while there has been much research that has examined the educational outcomes for children in these mentoring relationships, there has been a paucity of research particularly focusing on the perspectives of adult volunteers in schools and especially corporate volunteer mentors (e.g., Caldarella, Gomm, Shatzer, & Wall, 2010). This is unfortunate, as information gleaned from these corporate volunteers in educational settings could prove useful for the focus of future mentoring relationships and could also build the capacity of schools to attract and retain such valuable volunteers. Consequently, the researchers of the current study aimed

to address this gap in the literature by exploring the motivations of corporate volunteers and the benefits they perceived their mentoring of children brought to themselves, their workplace, the schools, and the mentees.

### **Motivation to Volunteer in Schools: Theory and Research**

Hustinx, Cnaan, and Handy (2010) noted that there are multiple theories of volunteerism and suggested that this was because of a general lack of agreement among researchers concerning what constitutes volunteerism. However, these authors observed that researchers do agree that people's motivations to volunteer center around altruistic and self-interested reasons. Using a functional approach to investigating why people volunteer, Clary et al. (1998) proposed a model that incorporates both of these elements. The model is comprised of six functions. All six functions can be understood as motivations to volunteer and benefits associated with volunteering:

1. Values: volunteering allows people to express personal values of an altruistic or humanitarian concern for others;
2. Understanding: being able to learn new skills or to use existing skills that may otherwise go unused;
3. Career: benefits related to one's career development;
4. Social: allowing socialization with others;
5. Protective: reducing negative feelings such as guilt about being prosperous; and
6. Enhancement: benefits related to personal growth and development.

In subsequent work, Clary and Snyder (1999) found that the strongest motivations to volunteer were those of values, understanding, and enhancement. This finding has been partially supported in a recent study in which the most important motivations to volunteer were found to be related to values and understanding (Caldarella et al., 2010).

### **Benefits of Mentoring Programs to Stakeholders**

#### *Benefits to Children*

In educational settings, participation in mentoring programs has been shown to yield positive effects for young participants. Positive outcomes for mentees include: higher school achievement (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008), gains in reading scores (Hornery, 2011), increased social competence and emotional adjustment (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002), and a more positive self-image (DuBois et al., 2002). In a recent meta-analysis, Ritter, Barnett, Denny, and Albin (2009) found that adult volunteers had a positive but moderate impact on students' academic outcomes. Effect

sizes increased when volunteers concentrated on specific skills, such as reading letters and words. Hence, mentoring programs that have a specific focus are more likely to benefit children receiving mentoring.

### *Benefits to Mentors*

The positive effects of mentoring programs extend also to the mentor (Eby & Allen, 2008; Wilson, 2001). In organizational settings, the benefits of programs to mentors include an increase in: visibility, respect, organizational power and performance, career rejuvenation, and increased opportunities for networking (Casto, Caldwell, & Salazar, 2005; Chao, 2009), thereby enhancing professional identity and self-respect (Hegstad, 1999). In addition, in a school-based setting, Caldarella et al. (2010) found that volunteers experienced benefits associated with feeling useful, growing personally, and sharing with friends in an activity that is highly valued by others, along with reduced negative emotions. These reported benefits correspond with Clary et al.'s (1998) functions of enhancement, social and protective, respectively. Therefore, for individuals, mentoring programs benefit both mentors and mentees.

### *Benefits to Organizations*

For organizations, the benefits of mentoring programs to individual employees also contribute to organizational wellness and advancement. Mentoring has been recognized as a useful human resource development strategy (Hegstad, 1999; Peterson, 2004a; Rieg, 2006). Indeed, mentorship benefits organizations by contributing to improved employee motivation, performance, commitment and retention, and by building both individual skills and teamwork (Chao, 2009; DeLong, Gabarro, & Lees, 2008; Phillips, 2000; Rieg, 2006).

## **The Need for Corporate Volunteers in Schools**

Traditionally, parents have been used as volunteer mentors, particularly in education systems (Rhodes, Bogat, Roffman, Edelman, & Galasso, 2002), and parental involvement in schools has been associated with positive outcomes for students including increased student achievement (Hirsto, 2010; Taylor & Pearson, 2004), increased self-esteem and sense of belonging (Worthy & Hoffman, 1999), and increased literacy (Neuman, 1995). However, because of changes to the economy (Anderson, 1994; Wyeth & Thomson, 1995) and to families, communities, and schools, particularly in urban areas (Rhodes et al., 2002), it has become increasingly difficult to enlist parent volunteers. It is particularly difficult for parents of lower socioeconomic status and parents from non-English speaking backgrounds living in English-speaking countries to mentor students (Kroeger, 2005; Neuman, 1995; Rhodes et al., 2002; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011). Consequently, other sources for volunteers have had to be explored.

Increasingly common sources of volunteer mentors are large corporate organizations. According to Peterson (2004a), a corporate volunteer program is “any formal organized company support for employees and their families who wish to volunteer their time and skills in service to the community” (p. 615). Because of the benefits provided by corporate volunteer programs to the community as well as to the organization and its public image (Muthuri, Matten, & Moon, 2009; Peterson, 2004a, 2004b; Rieg, 2006), an increasing number of national and international firms in the USA (Peterson, 2004a, 2004b), Canada (Fuller, 1993), Australia (Cavallaro, 2007), and the UK (Colley, 2003; Gibb, 1994) are in the process of developing and expanding their participation in corporate volunteer programs (Miller, 1999; Peterson, 2004a). In particular, many organizations are partnering with schools (Phillips, 2000) as ways to involve the community in the development of children and adolescents (Miller, 1999) and to encourage schools to become effective and cosmopolitan learning communities (Ranson, Arnott, McKeown, Martin, & Smith, 2005).

In the USA, the matching of schools with private sector companies has increased since 1983. Indeed, in 2011, school-based mentoring accounted for nearly half of all youth mentoring programs in the USA (Schwartz, Rhodes, Chan, & Herrera, 2011), and in the UK, by 2002, one in three schools was using corporate volunteers in a systematic way (Colley, 2003). Initially, corporate mentoring programs in schools focused on the development of social and work-related skills in young people (Miller, 1999), but more recently, such programs have focused on supporting children and adolescents in the attainment of key skills such as reading (e.g., Burr & Tartarian, 1997; DeMoulin & Sawka, 1998) and the growth of positive attitudes toward life-long learning (e.g., Miller, 1999).

### **The Present Research**

Despite the increase in corporate volunteer programs across western industrialized nations over the last decade, researchers have focused on the outcomes of participation for the students being mentored (e.g., Burr & Tartarian, 1997; DeMoulin & Sawka, 1998) or for the organizations sponsoring the volunteers (Cavallaro, 2007; Muthuri et al., 2009), particularly in terms of implications for the organization’s human resource development and reputation-building strategies (Muthuri et al., 2009). There is a paucity of empirical research to date that has explored the motives and gains of the volunteers engaged in these corporate mentoring programs within schools. This line of enquiry is critical if we are to continue to attract individuals to provide this valuable support within schools. In the present study, we aimed to address this deficit in the research literature. Consequently, two research questions (RQs) were posed:

RQ1. What motivates corporate employees to volunteer as mentors to assist struggling children in local schools?

RQ2. How do corporate volunteers perceive the impact of their mentoring on themselves, their workplace, the schools, and mentees?

## Method

### Participants

Twenty-six volunteers (22 females and 4 males) serving as mentor reading buddies participated in our current study. The mentors participated in the program as part of a workplace-initiated community engagement activity and were drawn from one multinational company and one law firm. Seven of the mentors occupied a factory line role, while the other 19 occupied office-based positions. The mentors were involved in a reading buddy program in two local New South Wales Department of Education and Communities schools in two distinct geographical and cultural contexts in Sydney, Australia. The children being mentored in the buddy program were aged 5–10 and enrolled in primary school. The mentors' involvement in the program included attending an initial three-hour training session; a one-hour orientation session at the school; 15 weekly 45-minute sessions in the school with their mentee one-on-one; a midway one-hour additional training session; and attendance at a celebration party at the end of the program.

### Procedure

Potential participants were briefed about the nature of the research and assured confidentiality and anonymity prior to the commencement of the study. All participants provided informed written consent. Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with approximately three to five participants in each group (with a total of six groups). These interviews were held at the culmination of the mentoring program when the mentors came together with the children to celebrate the end of the mentoring program.

The focus group interviews were conducted face-to-face, and the format comprised unstructured and mostly open-ended questions with the intention of eliciting views, opinions, and experiences of the participants. The data collection and analyses are consistent with phenomenology as the researchers asked open-ended questions in order to understand the experience of the participants (Creswell, 2009). The focus group interviews were audiotaped and transcribed to facilitate interpretation.

Data analysis was conducted consistent with Creswell's (2009) eight-step approach whereby the researchers engaged in a systematic process of analyzing

textual data moving from raw data to coding, interrelating of themes, and interpreting the meaning of themes. The purpose was to identify common themes but also present negative or discrepant information. This process was facilitated with QSR NVivo 9 software.

In order to promote qualitative reliability, inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2009) was measured whereby a research assistant who was not involved in the project was asked to follow the same eight-step procedure to construct themes independently without knowledge of the code established by the researcher. This initial cross-checking generated an 80% agreement in themes identified. The themes were then reviewed based on this process to incorporate a reconciled position.

## Results

### Motives to Volunteer in Schools (RQ1)

Mentors identified two primary motives for volunteering within the school. These were categorized as the desire to provide direct assistance to a child in need and to make a contribution to their community. This is consistent with the Clary et al. (1998) emphasis on “values” as one of the major motivations for volunteering, which include providing direct help to children in need and contributing to the local community.

#### *Help a Child Directly*

A consistent theme throughout the focus group interviews was the desire to help a child improve their situation. Several of the volunteers identified that they were drawn to the program because they could help the local community in a direct, hands-on manner, and this was more appealing than other avenues like simply donating money:

I guess I wanted to make a difference in a kid’s life and help them read.

Just basically giving a kid a better start in life, ‘cause actually they do need it. With my little child...he does need as much encouragement as possible.

I think doing something in the local community that’s face-to-face. It’s not...handing money over and you not be able to do so [interact]; like [the company does] match dollar for dollar a lot of things, but I find this type of thing a lot more rewarding because it is face-to-face.

For many of the mentors, they spoke about wanting to help children to improve their reading so that the children can experience the joy of reading. This goal was built on the love that the mentors had for reading and books:

I think what I set out to achieve was basically make reading enjoyable for another individual, because I love reading, and I'd like to share that experience with someone else.

Because I think it is so important for a child to be able to read, and I've instilled that in my own children. To me there is nothing greater than if you've got some quiet time, just to sit somewhere and disappear into a book, and I want to share that with other people.

### *Give Back to the Community*

When asked about the motives for volunteering in the local school, many of the mentors responded with a similar coined phrase around "giving back to the community." This appeared to be an overarching goal with the additional attraction of helping children:

I think it's also, we get so caught up in, sometimes, such things that don't really matter, and then you know, to see that you are making a difference, I think, is really important.

Just giving back to the community, that's what it is, that's my little help.

It was more doing a community thing, and I feel like I need to do my bit for the community.

### **Benefits to the Mentors (RQ2)**

Reflections about the rewards of serving as mentors resulted in three main clusters of responses. These included the realization that the mentors themselves had grown personally, developed personal insight, and experienced a sense of satisfaction through their mentoring role.

#### *Personal Development*

Mentors reported that through their experience in the program they developed personally. These areas of development included: learning to work with children; learning patience; improved confidence in themselves; and improved communication skills:

Learning the tools to teach them how to read. I think that's a plus to help—for me—it would be grandchildren, great-grandchildren.

You learn a lot of patience, but you learn to enjoy yourself as well. You learn not to take everything completely seriously.

I think you find a sense of confidence in yourself in being able to teach these kids.

I think everybody that has walked away has learnt something from it, something about themselves.



I was just slightly anxious that I wouldn't be able to be patient and explain things and be interested, and I think all of those things have all improved, and I think that will have an effect just more generally in my life, not just with the reading.

### *Personal Insight*

A few of the mentors reflected on their experience as adding more to their lives than simply skill development. Some described personal insight:

I've never really had much of a problem with reading...everything came easy for me in my life, school, university, even this job. To see how someone else struggles and the hassles they face, it has changed the way I view everything, every client who comes to see me, I now have a different perspective, and I would never have had that experience.

Just to be able to...forget about yourself for one minute and actually completely focus on someone else. I think in today's world, we're all so busy, caught up in our lives, etcetera, sometimes we don't do that enough, and I think it was just, it was able to kind of take me to a completely different area and just say, you know what, I don't care. I'm going to miss that...meeting today...because I've committed to this child.

### *Satisfaction*

The most dominant theme communicated by the mentors was their sense of satisfaction with volunteering in the program. This satisfaction stemmed primarily out of watching the children make gains in their skills and enjoying the relationship each mentor built with the child:

You get so much back from it, and seeing someone else improve in their reading is a really good experience.

I feel like I've achieved something, and especially towards the end when I started to see results. It's lovely.

To see them then get through a book without stopping, after you've had to help them with every second word the first time, to see them progress and into more difficult books and into reading more fluently, you just go, wow, that's really cool.

I just got a lot of personal satisfaction knowing that I've done something to help.

These perceived benefits are consistent with Clary and Snyder (1999) who found "understanding" as a major motivation for volunteering. Apart from this, there also seemed to be other important factors described by Clary et al. (1998), including benefits related to career, personal, and social development.

## Impact on the Workplace (RQ2)

The mentors reported that their role as a volunteer mentor had a significant impact on their workplace in a range of ways. For the most part, this impact was positive. Seven of the 26 mentors, however, occupied factory-based roles where their shifts required them to be on the factory line. In contrast to the employees based in an office, these mentors generally found that their mentoring role had a negative impact on their workplace because of the nature of their role in the company.

### *Positive Perceptions*

The central position communicated by the mentors was that as employees, they came to view the company in a more favorable manner. Mentors expressed that as a result of the program they perceived the company as generous and committed to social justice. They experienced pride in working with the company and received positive responses from others when they divulged about the workplace-initiated program:

The fact that I can participate in a program like this makes me think more highly of the company, that they're giving something back to the community, and I know as an employee it's certainly something that I have enjoyed every week, and it sort of makes it seem like a better place to be.

It makes me feel proud to work for a company that's willing to do that and places that importance on children's development. I tell everyone I know, and I just feel so proud to actually be involved.

### *Strengthening Relationships*

One of the byproducts of the employees' involvement in the program was that they were able to connect with other employees within the business:

One of the benefits is connecting with other people. Just walking to and from the school, and the connection you have with people that you don't normally connect with.

### *Managerial Support*

The majority of the mentors felt that their managers were very supportive of their volunteering. A few of the mentors mentioned that they felt that their direct managers were unhappy about them leaving to volunteer in the schools. As a result, some of them elected to volunteer on their own time to alleviate this pressure in the workplace. Interestingly, this was only reported by employees working within factory roles. It is likely that these roles offer less flexibility than office-based roles:

Well, my boss wasn't very happy if I had to leave from work...my teammates on the floor were quite happy to cover me for that hour I was gone...he [the boss] didn't really like it. But usually I left from home, I changed my day, and I, like I'd do it either Tuesday or Wednesday, and so it didn't impact on him at all.

When these employees leave the factory floor to complete their role as a volunteer, another employee must replace them, therefore placing stress on both managers and, potentially, other employees. This theme appears to be unique to volunteers originating from factory roles in the study.

I actually heard it from other readers, because they got a bit of a hard time not just from their direct manager or shift manager, from actual people that were working on the floor with them.

### **Benefits to Participating Schools (RQ2)**

Mentors were unanimous that schools benefited from their involvement in the program. Two main themes were evident: Mentors identified that the program provided assistance to schools where resources are limited and that the volunteers gathered a unique appreciation of the teacher's role through their involvement. None of the mentors reported any negative experiences for the participating school. If the perspective of the school staff had been considered, divergent themes may have been identified. This, however, was not the focus of the current study.

#### *Assistance for Resource-Limited Schools*

Several mentors recognized that schools have limited resources to assist students who may be struggling with the activities and environment of the classroom. For them, the most significant asset that the mentoring program offered to the schools was the additional "pair of hands" to provide one-on-one attention to these children:

I've always thought that kids just needed more one-on-one time, and a program like this gives it. Sometimes there's nothing that schools can do about it, 'cause they're stretched.

One thing that I find when you're working with a child one on one, I think the child benefits a lot, because they can't get that level of attention in the classroom...the school system just doesn't have enough money to do it.

#### *Appreciation of Teachers' Role*

Mentors demonstrated a new appreciation of the role of a teacher:

I take my hat off to these teachers, I really do. I only had one child, and he was an absolute nightmare, and I'm thinking, if I was a teacher and I had six of these students, I'd resign. I'd be out of there, so I really take my hat off to them; they're God-sent as far as I'm concerned.

### **Perceived Impact on the Mentees (RQ2)**

Throughout the interviews, the issue that received the most attention was the perceived changes that occurred for the children with whom the mentors were working. The majority of mentors believed that the children made significant improvements in their reading skills, confidence, and enjoyment in the task. They also identified that the children benefited from having the individual attention that their mentoring relationship offered. Some mentors, however, voiced the concern that over the duration of the program they did not directly witness improvements in their buddy's reading skills within the sessions.

#### *Enhanced Reading Skills*

Most of the volunteers reported a marked improvement in the child's ability to read and apply the strategies that were being practiced:

It's just fabulous to see when they're reading, and they stop or pause, and they're stuck; suddenly their little brains are ticking over, and you hear them, they're pointing, they're looking, they're sounding [it out], and you think, they listened; they actually listened, and that's just, I think, that's wonderful that those little triggers that we've been able to give them, that they're actually putting them to use.

I've just noticed a massive improvement in—from start to finish—in all the other games that we played. That was really, really good with the sight words, oh, just flew through them in the end...a big improvement.

I mean, I thought a child would improve, I didn't think that it would be as dramatic as what I've seen...previously, he was reading below the standard level for the class, and when we went to get a book from the classroom the other day, he was actually picking out of the extension bucket, so clearly he has surpassed what his classmates are doing.

However, a few questioned whether any progress was made by the child and felt that improved reading ability was not evident. One of the most prominent barriers cited was the behavior of the child, such as his or her inability to focus, high distractibility, and off task behavior:

I think I got the naughty child of the whole group, and he just didn't want to do it...I was quite disappointed, because I actually wanted to be there and try and teach a child, so basically I've come out of it thinking I failed...to me, he has not improved at all.

*Gain in Confidence*

A key theme was that the program resulted in an increase in the confidence level of the children with reading and in general. The mentors reported that the children appeared more confident in their reading ability, more likely to attempt tasks, and more confident in communicating to the mentors in the sessions:

Going in, I thought it was more about the reading, but for my child, it was more self-esteem and confidence, and it was just lovely watching him transform because he really is different; he's just come such a long way.

*Increased Interest and Enjoyment*

An increase in the children's enjoyment and interest in reading was clearly witnessed by many of the mentors:

I think the attitudes change. I think it becomes not a task anymore, rather something that's fun and can be enjoyable when they see the positive things in reading.

*Feeling Special*

Mentors described how the children appeared to value the one-on-one time with their mentor and felt special by being involved in the program and building a unique relationship with their mentor. Mentors recognized that this outcome occurred because of the developmental stage of the child and the context of the children where they may not have a chance to receive individualized time or feel special:

Every time I turn up, you never ceased to be amazed by the expressions on their face when you pick them up from the classroom...they are just so overwhelmed and so excited to see you every week.

Just to know that they've got 45 minutes of your undivided attention is a wonderful thing.

I think it's the fact that these children are made to feel special, so they're taken out of class by a grownup, and that probably won't work in later years, but at this age they seem to be almost envied.

Although these volunteers' perceptions of their influence on the development of children may be taken as replications of positive effects of mentor programs on mentees found in previous research, it is important to note that our focus is placed on the mentors' perceptions. In particular, the illustration of their perceptions in terms of three major factors as described by Clary and Snyder (1999)—value, understanding, and enhancement—is particularly valuable

in highlighting what may attract the volunteers to continue to serve as mentors in school settings.

## Discussion

Mentor programs are becoming popular internationally with companies providing opportunities for their employees to volunteer in the community. This trend is encouraging as schools have the potential to benefit from harnessing this additional resource to support the development of their students. In order to attract corporate volunteers, school personnel need to understand what motivates volunteers to serve within a school and what is likely to retain their involvement within the school. The present authors sought to address the limited research examining the perspectives and experiences of the actual volunteers after participating in mentor programs so that schools might become better equipped to forge such partnerships. In this study, adult volunteers worked with children in a school setting using a reading buddy program (see Hornery, 2011). Consistent with Grassinger et al.'s (2010) definition of mentoring, the relationship between the students and their mentors led to gains in children's reading skills, interest, and sense of competence (see Hornery, 2011).

Mentors in the present study volunteered to participate in the reading buddy program predominantly to make a difference in the lives of children and to give back to the community. Mentors were attracted to the direct, hands-on involvement with children in the reading buddy program, believing this to be a more worthwhile opportunity than traditional donations of financial aid. These findings support the trends of altruistic and self-interest motivations reported in previous research (Caldarella et al., 2010; Clary et al., 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1999; Hustinx et al., 2010). Mentors held beliefs around wanting to help children and contribute to the community, and the reading buddy program provided them with an opportunity to act on these values.

The motivations to volunteer described by the participants in the present study provided support for three of the six motivations proposed by Clary et al. (1998). The most common motivations expressed by the mentors in the present study were to help children directly (values), to learn and use new skills in helping children with their reading (understanding), and to participate in something that would be a positive experience for them personally (enhancement). Mentors wanted to help children read and instill in them a love of reading so that they could achieve more in their lives. Mentors also expressed a desire to learn new skills, have an opportunity to develop patience, and take time out of their busy schedules to give back to the community. These

three functions have also been suggested by Clary and Snyder (1999) in subsequent work to be the strongest of the motivations for volunteers. As such, the findings of the present study add further support to the model of volunteer motivations suggested by Clary et al. (1998). Although the individual motivations for a group of volunteers may vary, commonalities in relation to helping others, learning new skills, and participating in a personal journey are clearly identified. Future volunteering opportunities should consider these motivations when developing and engaging interest for new programs.

In addition to understanding the motivations for mentors to volunteer, the present researchers also investigated the perceptions of the mentors in relation to the outcomes of their involvement in the reading buddy program on themselves, their workplace, the schools, and mentees. The mentors reported that their mentees made gains in reading and acknowledged the role of their involvement in facilitating such gains. They also identified outcomes for schools as a consequence of their involvement and described the depth of their personal satisfaction and growth. The experience of participating in the reading buddy program was positive for the mentors.

Mentors identified the progress the children made as the most enjoyable aspect of participating in the reading buddy program. Mentors observed the progress their students made throughout the program and described this with pride throughout the focus group interviews. These findings are consistent with the large body of research describing positive outcomes for the participants of mentor programs (e.g., Burr & Tartarian, 1997; DeMoulin & Sawka, 1998). Our findings show that the outcomes of the children significantly contributed to each mentor's overall perception of the experience. That is, mentors experienced the most reinforcement for their efforts when they could observe a tangible change in the children with whom they worked. This is supported not only by the mentors' positive experiences of gains, but also by the comments from one mentor whose child had not made significant gains in the program. Further research should seek to identify the correlation between the outcomes of the beneficiaries of mentor programs and how this may affect the satisfaction levels of the mentors. Understanding this relationship further may guide the planning of future volunteering programs to include more information for mentors about their contributions.

Mentors gained perspective on the reality of school environments and expressed the belief that their involvement in this program assisted schools and communities in caring for children. Mentors were conscious of the impact the individual attention they gave a child might have on the greater community. These comments suggest that the altruistic motivation to initially volunteer (Clary et al., 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1999; Hustinx et al., 2010) is also an

outcome experienced by the mentors. In the present study, mentors wanted to give back to the community, and their perceptions of their involvement confirmed for them that they have achieved this. Mentors reported that the experience has been successful in helping individuals and schools.

Mentors reported that they learned new skills in teaching and supporting reading skill development in children. The experience also taught mentors in the present study about the reading process for children and the impact of disruptions on children learning to read. By working closely with a child experiencing reading difficulties, mentors saw firsthand the emotional impact of this reading failure. The mentors' new skills were evidenced by their specific language (e.g., "sight words") used in the descriptions of children's progress. One mentor described how these new skills would help many generations of her own family. Thus, understanding was a motivation prompting mentors to volunteer in the reading buddy program, also noted by Clary et al. (1998) as an observable outcome for mentors. In essence, the mentors expressed pride in their abilities to implement their new skills of teaching reading and working with children.

Mentors in our study were also proud of their involvement and shared their participation with others in their lives. They were grateful that their company allowed them to participate. These views are consistent with the body of research identifying human resource gains for the companies who provide volunteering opportunities (Hegstad, 1999; Peterson, 2004a; Rieg, 2006). Mentors in the present study expressed positive feelings towards their employer as a result of having been provided with this opportunity. Companies are able to benefit internally from establishing volunteering programs. The present researchers have also identified some issues for companies to consider when establishing and managing volunteer programs. Equity for mentor participation was an issue that arose during the focus group interviews, with some of the factory workers reporting that they did not always have the support or flexibility awarded to them to participate. The mentors who had to fulfill a production aspect of their company and had to take time out of the process to participate in the reading buddy program were not always shown support from their direct line manager. The difficulties faced by the mentors in being available for the reading buddy program is a serious concern not only for corporations, but for schools. If employees do not receive full support to volunteer within schools while in a work-related program, then their capacity to participate and to feel a sense of belonging within the school community will be threatened.



## Conclusion

The implementation of corporate volunteer programs in school settings is rapidly increasing in Australia and internationally (Colley, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2001). The reading buddy program in the present study is consistent with these international trends. Researchers have spent considerable time evaluating the impact of these mentor programs from the perspectives of the direct beneficiaries (mentees) and the companies who provide these opportunities. The findings are consistently positive. In relation to school-based mentor programs, the children improve in the desired skills and in a range of psychosocial variables (i.e., confidence, self-esteem; DuBois et al., 2002; Eby et al., 2008; Hornery, 2011). Companies also benefit from providing these opportunities to their employees, with reported gains in the areas of human resources and public relations (Casto et al., 2005; Chao, 2009; Rieg, 2006). To date, the experiences of the mentors in such programs have been underrepresented in the research literature. The present researchers have provided a voice to the mentors of a reading buddy program to understand their motivations for volunteering and their perceptions of the outcomes of this program.

It is critical that these voices are heard by school personnel. When school–community partnerships are formed, they are typically initiated by the local educators in the school (e.g., Beabout, 2010; Hands, 2005). Therefore, educators who understand the perspectives of their prospective partners are more likely to be successful in establishing productive school–community alliances. It is envisaged that school personnel can now examine and leverage the key findings of this study to successfully recruit and retain corporate volunteers to partner with them to assist children in need of extra support, creating and sustaining effective school communities which embrace members of the community at large. When schools have a solid understanding of the forces driving and sustaining corporate volunteering in schools, they can then promote and structure partnerships effectively. As a result, children, schools, and corporate volunteers themselves will reap the potential benefits.

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Danielle Tracey is an educational and developmental psychologist, a lecturer in educational psychology, and the convenor of Inclusive Education at the University of Western Sydney. Her research interests primarily focus on the social and emotional development of children who experience difficulty learning. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dr. Danielle Tracey, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW, 2751, Australia, or email [d.tracey@uws.edu.au](mailto:d.tracey@uws.edu.au)

Samantha Hornery is the manager of educational support at Learning Links, Australia. She is a trained primary and special education teacher specializing in reading difficulties. Her research interests include children with learning disabilities and effective interventions to address disadvantage.

Marjorie Seaton is a lecturer in the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education at the Australian Catholic University and a trained teacher. Her research interests include gifted and talented education, self-concept, social comparison, anti-bullying interventions, and teacher feedback.

Rhonda Craven is a professor and the director of the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education at the Australian Catholic University. Her research focuses on the structure, measurement, development, and enhancement of self-concept and key psychosocial drivers of potential; the effective teaching of indigenous studies and indigenous students; maximizing life potential in diverse settings; and interventions that make a tangible difference in educational settings.

Alexander S. Yeung is a professor and deputy director of the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education at the Australian Catholic University. He is a registered teacher, a psychologist, a professional translator, a linguist, and an educational researcher. His expertise includes self-concept, motivation, measurement and evaluation, cognition and instruction, and language and psychological studies.