

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF HIGH SCHOOL  
MENTORS WITH ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine Elementary Teachers Perceptions of the use of High School Mentors with the children in their classroom. Data was collected during the end of the third quarter in the 2001-2002 school year from teachers with students directly involved in the mentoring relationship.

The Durand School District has a mentoring program designed to provide elementary students with listening, fun and encouragement. High School mentors are matched with at-risk students and spend time for a half-hour each week on school grounds with the students. Teachers, parents and counselors refer elementary students. These students receive mentors for a variety of reasons, including, family change, new

student to the school, only child and behavior problems. The focus of this program is not on academics but rather on building positive relationships with older role models.

The instrument was designed to measure the four main objectives in this study. The instrument was given to the teachers of the eighty kids who participated in the school-mentoring program in the Durand School District. Student behavior, academics and an overall perception of the program were measured in the survey.

Fourteen teachers returned the survey. Six of the teachers (43%) felt that students behavior was positively influenced by the use of the mentor. All fourteen (100%) felt that overall the mentoring program was effective. No teachers (0%) believed it was an ineffective program or student behavior and academics declined because of the mentoring program.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Many obstacles confront today's young children. These obstacles become more difficult to overcome when a child is asked to conquer them alone. The author believes that some of these problems may arise from the change in family dynamics in today's society. There is a dramatic increase in one-parent homes, as well as two parent working families. These dynamics tend to leave children on their own, without the proper support from adults. The most troubling time may be after school hours, where those kids without guidance are left to fend for themselves with no structure (Synder & Sickmund, 1999). These tend to be the kids that find themselves in trouble.

Mentoring is a way in which adult contacts are provided for youth that may receive little guidance at school, home, in their community and in the workplace. Mentors also may assist in decreasing the dropout and crime rate in today's children (Dondero, 1997). Our younger generation emulates the examples they witness. If a child has a positive older role model to follow, they receive more support and guidance during their younger years. By allowing kids to be paired or have access to positive role models, we can fill part of the emptiness found at home.

The author believes that this is a serious issue and by enabling kids to mature without positive role models, it may negatively impact their lives. Today's children may be less likely to succeed in school because no one is checking up on them or encouraging them to do well. Young adults are also more likely to get in trouble with the law, drop out of school, or become unwed teen mothers (Petersmeyer, 1989). Today's juvenile statistics are concurrent with Petersmeyer's findings. In 1999, 71% of pregnant teens

were unwed. Juveniles were responsible for 16% of all violent crimes and 32% of all property crimes. Half of all people who end up in jail do not have a high school diploma and 40% of high school dropouts left school simply because it did not interest them or they were failing (Synder & Sickmund, 1999). It is the opinion of the author that these statistics could be lower if these children had someone whom they could admire and assist them with problems in and out of school. If having a positive role model means success to just one kid, isn't it worth trying?

The author's opinion is supported in some of Cuthall's statistics. She said that those students with mentors are 46% less likely to start using drugs, 33% less likely to commit violent criminal acts and 52% less likely to skip school (Cuthall, 2001).

Mentoring programs can serve many purposes. Academic or educational mentors can assist youth with improving their overall academic achievement. Youth may also gain the skills needed to enter or begin exploring various careers. Mentors may also be there to support individuals through times of stress. In addition, guidance can assist youth with decision-making skills (Mentoring, 2000). Rockwell (1987) felt that mentoring is extremely beneficial for students with disabilities. These students can find these relationships extremely rewarding because of their continued experiences with social and academic failure.

All kids should have a fair chance to realize their potential. However, those children from low socioeconomic backgrounds often do not get the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and talents. A good mentor is able to recognize and give attention to these talents, as well as motivate the student to attain his/her full potential. Too many times focus is put on the deficiencies of a child, which may lead a child to a

life of mediocrity or unrealized possibilities. If the expectation of a child is to be average or below average, then they will usually prove that belief right. A mentor is a non-judgmental person who sees the child for who they are and encourages them to work on their strengths (Goff & Torrance, 1999).

Children are not the only group who may benefit from having a positive role model. These mentors have been effective when working with professionals in the fields of athletics, business, and education (Lucas, 1998; Fellman, 1999; Fitch, 2000; Ballard, 2001 & Yourdon, 2001). There are many athletes who come into professional sports without any idea of the challenges they face. The more experienced players can take them under their wings and lead them by example. A perfect scenario the author can think of would be how Cris Carter took Randy Moss as his protégé. Moss came into the league as a speculated troublemaker who was too immature for the National Football League (NFL). Cris Carter taught him how to succeed and conduct himself both on and off the field. Moss has overcome critics and blossomed into one of the greatest receivers in the NFL (Lucas, 1998). According to the book Coaching and Mentoring for Dummies, a new employee can learn how to be more assertive, receive constructive feedback, establish goals, and gain positive direction in order to achieve success through the use of a mentor (Fitch, 2000). With the wide growth of the technology sector, one company is using veteran employees as mentors to recent college graduates. This pairing ends up saving the company millions of dollars in wasted costs and failed projects (Yourdon, 2001). A New York based Health group uses senior executives and senior level staff members as mentors. This way when entry level workers have questions on career growth, personal development, or about trends in the company that are new to their eyes,

they can consult with someone who has been their before (Fellman, 1999). In a school setting, new teachers gain support and encouragement to help them remain in the education field. In a Michigan school, a more experienced master's degree teacher was paired with five new teachers, with the base of their relationship being built on trust and mutual respect. This relationship established a sense of belonging among teachers which could be used to ensure that same feeling amongst the students (Ballard, 2001). If this type of relationship can be effective at the adult level where most people already have formed opinions, why can't it be successful at the elementary level when kids are trying to figure out right and wrong?

Many schools today implement some sort of mentoring program, but are the effects of it really measured? The results of this study may be used to measure the effectiveness of the mentoring program in the Durand School District. Results of the input by teachers may be used to improve the mentoring program and find out how teachers feel their kids can benefit from it.

A review of the literature shows that our young children act on behaviors older individuals display. By matching positive role models with younger students in need, not only is a friendship formed, but educational enhancement as well (Fiscus, 2000). One study also shows that high school students are more than just tutors and can assist youth in dealing with personal problems such as family trouble or drug abuse ("High school mentors help younger students through teenage problems", 1991). Therefore the research hypothesis for this study is that elementary school teachers will rate the importance of implementing high school mentors as a positive experience for the at-risk kids in their classroom.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate elementary teachers' perceptions of high school mentors and their effectiveness to improve student performance. This study will include a questionnaire for all K-4 teachers at Caddie Woodlawn Elementary School in Durand, Wisconsin during the spring of 2002 .

The study will focus on the following objectives:

1. To determine teacher's perceptions of student behavior effected by mentoring.
2. To determine teacher's perceptions of student academics effected by mentoring.
3. To determine teacher's perceptions if the school-mentoring program is successful.
4. To determine teacher's likes and dislikes about the current program.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

This chapter will review literature that is relevant to the mentoring process and mentoring programs. It will focus on what mentoring is as well as the benefits of it. Also it will discuss various programs that have been implemented throughout the country. At the conclusion of this chapter, there will be a description of the school-mentoring program that is being evaluated as the subject of this paper.

### What is mentoring?

O'Neil (1981) defined mentoring as the relationship between an individual with experience and an individual with less experience manifested through advisement, sponsorship or friendship.

Mentoring is a sustained relationship between a youth and an adult. It is taken from the Greek word, enduring. A young person may not have an older person to provide them with the proper guidance and this relationship allows them that opportunity. By being together, a younger individual may deal with difficult situations, face new challenges and correct current problems (Mentoring, 2000).

Campbell (2001) believes mentoring is a process in which an experienced adult shares their knowledge with a student. They believe this approach is extremely valuable when working with academically and behaviorally challenged students.

Campbell (2001) agreed with Mentoring (2000) by stating mentoring is a personal relationship that encourages and guides personal growth and development.

According to Lee (1999), a mentoring relationship causes higher interests in school, which in turn explains students' improved academic achievement. Fiscus (2000, p.25) stated little kids strive to be like big ones, patterning behavior, dress, speech and attitudes after older role models. Schools can use that influence through programs where older

students set out to affect younger ones positively by mentoring. This blending between levels promotes a comprehensive leadership program and helps students develop their potential at each level. Fiscus (2000) agreed with Lee (1999) and the effects of mentoring on increased academic achievement by saying it is rewarding to see the younger students wanting to learn from the older role models.

Arwood, Jolivette and Massey (2000) concurred with Lee (1999) about mentoring increasing knowledge and skills such as academic performance. However Arwood, Jolivette and Massey (2000) also found, “mentoring has other perceived benefits such as developing supports and friendships, improved self-esteem/confidence and an improved social network” (p. 36).

According to Algozzine & Campell (1997), the role of a mentor is to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to students by modeling skills that can assist them in personal growth and development.

Although each mentoring relationship is unique, there are basic elements that need to be present in order to be effective. The first is a set schedule, so the relationship can occur and regular contacts are made. Next, it is appropriate to screen and match applicants to ensure the safest and most rewarding experience possible. Finally, the mentor should be trained and the interaction of the relationship should be monitored (Arwood, Jolivette and Massey, 2000).

Previous research (Freiman, 2000) stated that children learn best from other children. Some teachers may feel that mentoring is positive, but only if the child is not going to be removed from their classroom in order to receive it. Arwood, Jolivette, and Massey (2000) suggested a few ways in which mentoring can be effective for social and

academic purposes within the natural classroom setting. Socially, mentors could be used effectively with new students and help them adjust accordingly due to the limited time the classroom teacher has to provide one-to-one attention. Academically, Arwood, Jolivette, and Massey (2000) believe mentors could be effective in checking work for mentees and providing feedback as well as working together for test preparation. This way the mentor could provide encouragement to keep the child working on challenging tasks. Campbell (2001) agreed with Arwood, Jolivette, and Massey (2000) in believing the mentor should provide academic support, teach and reinforce study skills, as well as assist in the completion of homework.

Campbell (2001) believed that mentors build a trusting relationship by demonstrating empathy, modeling, and being open and honest. The mentor should not expect immediate change and is not going to solve all of the mentees problems. To assist in ensuring a trusting relationship, mentors should be on time for their visits and notify the child immediately in case of a cancellation.

#### Various Programs and Outcomes

There are many different mentoring programs that have been used throughout our country over the years. Though the components of these programs are a little different, the ultimate positive outcome is similar. One of the first mentoring programs was Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Programs in Waukesha and Milwaukee counties have shown some encouraging statistics over the last few years. A 1996 study by Public/Private Ventures found that students with a mentor were less likely to start using drugs and alcohol or engage in violent behavior. There was improvement made in the areas of school attitudes and attendance, as well as peer and family relationships. These 1996 statistics are

comparable to the 1995 Public/Private Ventures study, which found children to be less likely to skip school or use drugs and alcohol if they had a mentor (Big Brother/Big Sister, 1999).

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Spokane, Washington have implemented a School-based mentoring program for children in grades 1-6 who are socially and academically at-risk. With the school-based mentoring program, a volunteer is matched with a child at a local school. The mentor can come in during lunch hour, study hall, after school, or on weekends. During this time the two individuals enjoy the gym, do homework, surf the net or just hang out. According to the evaluation of five school-based programs in Spokane, 77% of teachers felt those students involved increased their self-esteem. The statistics reported by those in the relationship were as follows: 64% had an increase in positive attitudes toward school, 58% achieved higher grades, 60% improved their relationships with adults, 56% improved their relationships with peers, 55% felt they expressed themselves better, 62% had a higher level of trust for their teachers than before, 40% read more often, and 75% reported smiling more often (Big Brothers/Big Sisters, n.d.).

Davalos & Haensly (1997) investigated ninety high school students who were paired with adult mentors for one year. Many positive outcomes and experiences were reported from being involved in this mentor relationship. Some of the positives included: improvement in self-esteem or self-concept, assistance in career exploration, and a growth in study and work skills. Improving in study and work skills allowed the students to be better prepared for college. These students were also very appreciative of doing

activities outside of the traditional classroom setting. This study concluded that mentor relationships could have a powerful long lasting effect on everyone involved.

Washington, DC has a private, non-profit organization called Mentors, Inc. This program pairs high school students with trained adult mentors. The goal of this program is to assist students in receiving their high school diploma. Not only do these kids receive a diploma, but a life after school plan in which they use to pursue a fulfilling career. Of the students who were involved in the program, 80% went on to attend college. An astonishing number, especially when compared to the fact that only 50% of the rest of the city received a high school diploma on time. The Ford Foundation Study in 1999 found that students with a mentor were more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and become more involved in community service (Mentors, Inc., n.d.).

Lee (1999) agreed with the Ford study in that he said a mentoring relationship causes increased aspirations, which in turn cause students to acquire a greater meaning out of school. They also see that school failure can be detrimental to their future plans.

A 1996 study for Intergenerational Learning at Temple University found mentors lead to better attendance records, more positive adult relationships and a decrease in drug use (Mentors, Inc., n.d.).

A Washington, DC high school has seen positive results in their mentoring program with elementary students. Students involved in this program struggled academically. With a mentor there were no failing grades during the next school year. Besides working on academics, the high school students also assisted the youth with personal problems as well as planning and attending social and athletic events with their child (Mentor Bulletin, 1991).

With a decreasing exposure to adults, many elementary children are not being provided with responsible modeling. In Tennessee, two schools used high school mentors to teach responsibility to their elementary children. This program was a great experience for all involved. The high school students visited during their study halls and the elementary students seemed eager for their arrival. Although this was a relatively new program, teachers felt this was a positive experience for their children and the high school kids connected with their students in different ways than they could (Moore, 2000).

Bullying is prevalent at all levels of American schooling, but perhaps is most widely affected at the elementary level. One Massachusetts school used their peer-mentoring program to reduce the problem of bullying. By training their high school mentors to help the elementary school students deal with and understand harassment, teachers noticed a significant reduction in bullying at their school (Freiman, 2000). The effects of bullying may lead to individuals feeling isolated or unwanted. Fiscus (2000) reported on a Michigan high school that mentored at-risk elementary students during their playground time. Teachers reported that it made a huge difference for these kids who have little or no friends. It gave them a chance to have a “cool kid” play with them. Those children who were mentored took on similar positive qualities that the mentor was modeling for them. Is there a better way to help a kid in need than to allow someone to show they care?

Research suggests (Lee, 1999; Campbell, 2001) that children involved in positive relationships with adults adjust better to life’s problems. It is also more likely for children with positive role models to engage in healthier activities. Mentoring programs

are a way in which school and community can work together to show how valuable serving others can be. Children and adolescents are shown by example, how to help, not hurt others (Peer Helping Brochure, n.d.)

#### Description of Program Being Studied

The Durand School District matches high school seniors with elementary students in need in a mentoring relationship. This is not a tutoring program, but is about providing listening, encouragement and fun to the children involved. Teachers, Parents, and Counselors refer students for this program. Those students who have been suggested the most are the first to receive a mentor. There is a wide-range of reasons why children are referred, ranging from family, social and school related problems. A letter is sent home to the parents explaining the program and asking permission to pair their children with a mentor. The children meet with there mentor about thirty minutes per week throughout the entire school year. This is set up by the Mentor Advisor and has been running now for seven years.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the teacher's perceptions of having their elementary-aged children work with high school students during the 2001-2002 school year at Caddie Woodlawn Elementary School in Durand, Wisconsin.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter will include a description of the subjects, instrumentation, research procedures, data analysis and limitations of this study.

## Subjects

For the purpose of this study the population is defined as all teachers in the Caddie Woodlawn School District who had students involved in the mentoring program in the 2000-2001 academic school year. The teachers involved in the study included grades kindergarten through fourth.

## Instrumentation

Surveys were used as the measure of evaluation. The teachers that had one or more students in the mentoring program were given surveys. They were filled out on a voluntary basis and kept strictly confidential.

The researcher developed the surveys. They intended to measure teacher perceptions of the mentoring program. Teachers were asked to respond to part of the instrument using a rating scale to measure how they felt student behavior and academics were effected. Responses for these items were; 0= Regressed/Worsened, 1= Stable/No Change, 2= Improvement and 3= Significant Improvement. There was also space for a response explanation. There was a simple yes/no question about how effective teachers felt the overall program was. Lastly, there was space for the teachers to explain in further detail their likes/dislikes about the current program.

The researcher believed the survey was valid and measured what it intended to measure.

### Data Collection/Procedures

The data was distributed and collected in cooperation with the Caddie Woodlawn Elementary school counselor. Surveys were mailed to the counselor and they were then distributed among the cooperating teachers in the building. Teachers were also given the informed consent form and reassured that their participation was voluntary and confidential (See Appendix B). When teachers completed surveys they were mailed back to the researcher.

### Data Analysis

All appropriate descriptive statistics were run on the data. Calculations to address the four objectives were also conducted. Frequencies and percentages will be computed in order to analyze the results.

### Assumptions

1. Teachers would be honest about their responses towards the survey and about the current mentoring program.
2. Teachers would provide feedback about their likes/dislikes about the program in order to enhance this service in the future.
3. The high school mentors would maintain a working relationship with their mentee on a weekly basis.

### Limitations

1. The study is limited to one district. The findings may not easily be generalized throughout the entire population.
2. There was not a 100% response rate. Therefore the findings do not accurately reflect the entire district's perceptions.

3. The survey reflected on teacher's perceptions. These are merely questions and do not ask the teachers to act on them.
4. The teacher's may not have been completely honest when filling out the survey. They may have been responding in a way in which pleased the mentoring program coordinator.
5. The student's and mentor may have not met on a weekly basis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

## Introduction

This chapter will discuss the results of the survey in determining the mentoring program in areas of behavior, academics and overall effectiveness. Fourteen teachers returned the surveys. Of the fourteen, five teachers had numerous children currently in the program. Data is reported on each research objective using frequencies and percentages.

### Research Objective Number One

To determine if student behavior was effected by the use of a mentor. The results indicated that 43% of teachers indicated there was an improvement in behavior. Common responses for the improvement of behavior were that the mentoring relationship gives one to one attention to those children in need, improves self-esteem, social skills and attitude. The other 51% believed there was no change in behavior but that the experience as a whole was positive. No teachers believed that their child's behavior regressed as a result of working with a mentor.

### Research Objective Number Two

To determine if the student's academics were effected by the use of a mentor. The results indicated that unanimously (100%) the responding teacher's felt that there was no change in their student's academics. Teachers commented that this is not an academic program and therefore academics are not stressed. Some of the teachers felt that the program gave their children more confidence, which helped them in the classroom.

### Research Objective Number Three

To determine if the teachers perceived the current school mentoring program as effective. The results indicate that 100% of the teachers felt that the program was effective.

#### Research Objective Number Four

To determine teachers likes and dislikes about the current mentoring program. Of the fourteen teachers who returned the survey, twelve (86%) shared there thoughts regarding the program. Five teachers (42%) explained what they liked about the current program and seven (58%) shared what they would like to see changed. The most common positive feedback from 42% of the respondents was that it allowed for quality time and improved the self-esteem of the student. The most common concern from teachers (33%) was that it mentors were not appropriately trained to deal with elementary students.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion and Recommendations

## Discussion

The results of this study are limited due to the small sample population that was surveyed. However, when teachers from Caddie Woodlawn were asked if the current program was effective, all respondents answered “yes”. This response tends to agree with the literature the author cited throughout the paper. These findings by the author are very similar to that of a past study done by Moore (1999) on the Menomonie School District. Moore found that 100% of responding teachers felt that their students benefited overall by being involved in the mentoring program. .

A study done by Monson (2000) looked at the same mentoring program already in place in the Menomonie school district. This study showed that by having mentors work with their children, student attitudes and academics benefited.

Most would agree that we learn from watching and acting on the examples shown to us by older individuals. There are many people in this world that attribute their success to a mentor. Today’s children are unique, and are often asked to grow up too quickly. Parents are working longer hours, which leaves less time for them to interact and be a role model for their children. The divorce rate is rising, which may cause a child to lose their sense of stability. It only makes sense that there be someone available to the child and willing to show a commitment to help a child’s life become easier to lead.

The research in this study shows that teachers do feel that mentoring is effective. Teachers felt that student’s self-confidence was enhanced by the use of a mentor. The students involved in the program are allowed the opportunities to form a positive relationship that they may not of otherwise had.

Though teachers felt this program was effective, some offered suggestions on how it could be improved. There was a concern that mentors were not giving enough adequate training to best assist the elementary children. Quality training is essential in forming a positive and effective connection with a student. Half of the teachers who responded felt there should be more emphasis put on academics. Students involved in this program struggled academically as well as socially. It was also indicated that there is a need for clearer guidelines so that teachers and mentors could work more effectively together to best utilize this program.

#### Recommendations for the Future

Guidelines could be written so that staff has a better understanding of the purpose of the program. There could be a mandatory evaluation at the end of the year in order to see all perceptions of the program. The students involved at the high school and elementary level could be surveyed on how they felt about the program. This would enable the School District to evaluate the information from those directly involved in the program.

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***Teachers Perceptions of the Use of High School  
Mentors with Elementary Age Children***

1. What grade level do you currently teach? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please choose one of the following four options in Question 2 & 3. And briefly explain why.**

**Significant Improvement=3**

**Improvement=2**

**Stable/No Change=1**

**Regressed/Worsened=0**

2. How was student behavior effected by the use of a mentor? 3 2 1 0  
Briefly Explain?

3. How was student academics effected by the use of a mentor? 3 2 1 0  
Briefly Explain?

4. Do you feel the current school-mentoring program is effective? YES NO

5. Could you explain your likes/dislikes about the current mentoring program in your own words?

## **CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING IN GRADUATE STUDY**

You have the opportunity to take part in a study that examines the effectiveness of the current mentoring program in your district. The mentoring program coordinator is in support of this project, and I am asking for your voluntary participation.

Some of the benefits associated with this research are continuing studies about older role models working with elementary aged-children. Also by sharing your personal perceptions as teachers, various actions could be taken to improve your current program. The risks are minimal due to individual participants not being identified. By filling out this questionnaire, you are giving your informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about the research should be addressed to Brent Hawkins, the researcher at (715) 273-3908, or my Research Advisor, Rod Crist at (715) 232-1343. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, (715) 232-1126.

Thank you for your time,

Brent J. Hawkins