Virtual Mentoring: Harnessing the Power of Technology to develop a K-20 Leadership Collaborative

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Abstract:
CAMP (Collegiate Achievement Mentoring Program) Osprey is a leadership-mentoring program in which collegiate student leaders serve as mentors to at-risk K-12 students. To overcome geographic and financial barriers faced by our high-poverty, urban/rural partners throughout the state, we will be harnessing the use of "virtual leadership mentoring" and videoconferencing technology available on the UNF campus. This model is based on the previous initiative at the University of Florida, where mentors from Gainesville, Florida conducted virtual leadership mentoring sessions with students in North Carolina, Georgia and South Florida. Participants in the pilot program experienced increased standardized text scores, increased attendance and decreased school suspensions (Froman & Ohlson, 2011). This roundtable will share successes and challenges associated with program development, implementation and adaptation along with previous outcomes associated with collegiate mentor and middle-school mentee participants.

Theoretical Framework
Intergenerational mentoring is an effective strategy to prepare students to advance from secondary to post-secondary educational institutions (Dubois, et. al., 2002; Grossman, Tierney, and Resch, 2000). The same holds true for students who graduate from post-secondary institutions and enter the workplace. There are many benefits of mentoring, which concomitantly serve the interests and needs of mentees, mentors, community organizations and businesses (Klinge, 2015; Pidgeon, Archibald & Hawkey, 2014). Mentoring helps mentees develop and hone their mental tools, enhance academic skill sets that are necessary to formulate understanding, and prepare for the complexities of life (Klinge, 2015). Mentees view advice and instruction from mentors as validation of what was taught at home and school, and transition that learning to the workplace and community. For mentors, the relationship with their mentees allows for sharing of experiences such as one’s triumphs, failures, and successes, which are imperative for learners, to visualize in formulating their understanding of the complexities of life (Dobrow, et. al, 2012; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Klinge, 2015).
In many high needs areas, the lack of resources prompts stakeholders to look at the engagement and collective support and leadership from a variety of stakeholders to help meet the needs within an educational setting (Bryan, 2005). Collective leadership, in the framework of community engagement, operates under a shared belief that those closest to the problem are best qualified to effectuate systemic and sustainable change. Participants in the collective leadership process form a developmental network that functions as the nexus for all service and learning objectives. A major caveat to collective leadership and developmental networks is an understanding of the intra- and inter-personal dynamics that make the relationships work (Fullan, 2007). Collective leadership suitably lends itself to identifying, initiating, developing and sustaining developmental networks to implement community-engaged initiatives. The necessity of collective community leadership through developmental networks is best synopsized in the African proverb – “if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.”

Beyond face-to-face mentoring, the use of videoconferencing technology has demonstrated varying results. Virtual mentoring has shown to build relationship between individuals in remote locations, foster collaboration and a greater global perspective (Bierema & Merriam, 2002). In addition, virtual mentoring was found to be an effective tool for training and learning new skills (Seabrooks, Kenney, & LaMontagne, 2000). Even more powerful is the cultural baggage and stereotypes that accompany race, gender and social class become invisible in a virtual forum, freeing the mentoring to become the focus and thus allowing for greater communication and collaboration (Bierema & Merriam, 2002).

Section 2: Project Narrative
CAMP (Collegiate Achievement Mentoring Program) Osprey is a leadership-mentoring program in which collegiate student leaders serve as mentors to at-risk K-12 students. To overcome geographic and financial barriers faced by our high-poverty, urban/rural partners throughout the state, we will be harnessing the use of "virtual leadership mentoring" and videoconferencing technology available on the UNF campus. This model is based upon the CAMP Gator model at the University of Florida. The United Way and Jefferson Foundation featured this model as an exemplar for technology integration and community impact. In addition, the data from the pilot program has been presented at SITE, AACE, AERA and UCEA as well as numerous journals. Participants in the pilot program experienced increased GPA's, increased attendance and decreased school suspensions as well as research presentations at AERA, SITE and UCEA.

Testimonials from Participants
“Having a relationship with someone that is outside of the teacher, parent, principal (role) who you think genuinely cares about you — that’s pretty big, even if it’s on a virtual level.” “In this day and age, you can do that virtually just as well as you can face to face.” The mentors talk with the elementary students about everything from habits to goals to their own life experiences, while providing the children an audience to share their thoughts.
“Knowing that we can have an influence on kids and knowing how cool they probably think it is means a lot to us,” said one mentor. “It really does make a difference,” he said.

“They’re in college so they can tell you what to look forward to and how hard you have to work (to succeed),” said a fifth-grade mentee

Current State/Progress of Project
We are currently in the process of developing the program at UNF. The leadership-mentoring model will be based on the program developed at the University of Florida. Examples of our use of virtual mentoring in the past can be found at:

http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ975399

We are in the process of identifying exemplary collegiate student leaders who will serve as leadership mentors along with K-12 school partners from urban and rural settings throughout Florida. In addition we are adapting current leadership courses within the College of Education and Human Services to integrate the use of face-to-face and virtual mentoring to meet the collective goals of this K-20 partnership.

Methods and Data Sources
To examine the influence C.A.M.P. is having upon the mentors and mentees, mixed-methods will be utilized. The first component consists of the collection and analysis of student outcome data. For our mentees, these include the collection of attendance, suspension, and grade point average data. Upon entering the program, all student data (attendance, suspension, and grade point average prior to being mentored) will be collected. The data will be collected at the conclusion of the next grading period. The 16-week mentoring program implemented a schedule that directly coincided with the school-district grading period to allow for more uniformity in terms of data analysis. The sample population consists of 31 students. The sample will then be compared to a random control group consisting of 31 students as well.

To augment the student-outcome information, the collection and analysis of qualitative data will also be employed. These data included parent and teachers interviews as well as interviews with the students themselves. The interviews are voluntary and will be conducted within the school setting. The interviews include questions surrounding the child’s personal, academic, and leadership skills before and after participation in the 18-week mentoring program. Collegiate students will participate in the data collection process including administering exit questionnaires as a means of introducing mentors to educational research and data to influence decision-making.

To examine the influence the program had upon the collegiate student mentors, mentors will also be asked to participate in a leadership efficacy surveys at the start and then completion of the program. These surveys were developed to examine their
perceptions of their public speaking confidence, goal setting abilities, willingness to take
on new challenges, and leadership abilities. These surveys will also examine the
student’s change or lack thereof in their willingness to work with children and
demonstrate an increased sense of empathy for others.

Impact of Project on faculty’s teaching, research/creative, and/or service
activities.
The use of virtual mentoring allows collegiate mentors to reach a wide range of K-12
mentees and we will be looking at the mutually beneficial outcomes of this initiative.
Previous research analyzed mentor/mentee GPA, retention and access to college and
career resources.
The teaching within our courses will be augmented with the inclusion of
videoconferencing mentoring and the use of guest speakers to support the leadership
curriculum. Then, the UNF service component will be met by reaching communities
beyond the greater Jacksonville area- promoting the commitment of this University to be
a partner in education on a state and national level.

Impact of the Technology Initiative of Educational Policy and Practice
The virtual mentoring within CAMP Osprey may serve as a model of collaboration,
demonstrating the power of technology to connect student leaders regardless of
geographic and logistic barriers. In this mutually beneficial partnership, all stakeholders
benefit. By developing low-cost initiatives that benefit students at all levels from a
variety of backgrounds, CAMP Osprey may serve as an exemplar for those searching
for ways to forge global learning community partnerships to enhance academic
excellence, student engagement and equity in a K-20 setting.

Publications/presentations resulting from the grant
Previously, this program has been featured in the Journal of Educational Multimedia
and Hypermedia, The Journal of Civic Commitment and the Journal of American Middle
Level Education. Conference presentations also include AERA, UCEA, SITE and SALT.
We hope to expand upon this research and gather insight from SITE attendees and
collective expertise of the SITE Community.

Impact of the project on students
This project has been shown to increase student engagement, retention and GPA
based on finding from the pilot program at UF. The program being developed at UNF
will likely exceed these outcomes based on the quality of educational technology
resources and access to support available at UNF in comparison to the resources
available at other institutions.

Future Plans
Future plans include the development and expansion of K-20 mentoring program that
utilizes virtual mentoring throughout the nation along with an online leadership
curriculum and activities. Future plans also include the dissemination of research,
outcomes and best practices to help propel UNF to be a leader in the field of virtual
mentoring- a field that could expand to various career and academic areas.
Appendix A.