University Students' Relationship-Based Mentoring in School Settings

Abu K. Mboka[1]

Abstract

How university students perform the tasks of mentoring, and the kinds of activities that are successful and unsuccessful in relationship-based mentoring interactions when mentors are instructed to "first establish relationships and then use the relationship to promote prosocial thinking and behaviors," remains an unfamiliar area of youth mentoring. Thus, the purpose of this study is to develop some understanding of steps criminal justice majors took and the behavioral goals and objectives they pursued during their semester-long mentoring interactions with primary, middle, and high school pupils within a local school district. Conventional content analysis methods were used to systematically identify, classify, and code themes and patterns of self-reported activities. Results show that student-mentors overwhelmingly engaged in activities that addressed known risk factors associated with antisocial thinking, attitudes, and behaviors. The results provide insights into the dynamics of this form of mentoring that emphasizes the importance of healthy relationships between protégés and mentors and advance reasons for further investigation of the effectiveness of a relationship-based mentoring approach.

Keywords

relationship-based mentoring, benefits of youth mentoring, service learning, university student-mentors, mentoring activities

The benefit of youth mentoring to mentees and mentors is well documented (Bellamy, Springer, Sale, & Espiritu, 2004; DuBois, Holloway, & Valentine, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Erdem, DuBois, Larose, De Wit, &

[1]California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock, USA

Corresponding Author:
Abu K. Mboka, Department of Criminal Justice, California State University, Stanislaus, One University Circle, Turlock, CA 95382, USA.
Email: amboka@csustan.edu

Lipman, 2016; Hughes et al., 2009; Miller, 2004; Weiler et al., 2013). The unsettled issues, however, are that the following aspects of mentoring remain blurry and largely neglected: research on the extent to which mentors actually perform the task of teaching, counseling, assisting, and supporting; the kinds of activities undertaken by mentors and mentees; approaches that work or do not work; knowledge about personal behavioral expectations that drives each mentor's interaction and which of these tasks works best or poses more challenges. In light of these shortcomings, this study uses conventional content analysis methods to develop some basic understanding of the different approaches university student-mentors take and the behavioral goals and objectives they pursue as well as the challenges they face during their interactions with primary, middle, and high school protégés, if the guideline for the mentoring is to first establish a healthy relationship with protégés.

Mentors who work with at-risk children are generally expected to teach, counsel, inspire, nurture, assist, befriend, and support protégés with the aim of helping them overcome their cognitive and behavioral difficulties (Wilson, 2000). State-sponsored youth mentoring programs specifically require mentoring activities that meaningfully affect healthy development of youth, gang activity, substance abuse, and school grades; promote community and civic engagement; offer guidance regarding future training and career, and provide activities that enhance and support protégés' prosocial lifestyles (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2012). These programmatic goals are influenced by the collective desire to provide at-risk youth with caring adult relationships and the desire to minimize delinquency, improve school performance, and correct various cognitive and behavioral deficiencies (Baker & Marguire, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to develop understanding of the approaches criminal justice majors took and the behavioral goals and objectives they pursued during their semester-long relationship-based mentoring interactions with primary, middle, and high school pupils within a local school district. This is important because "the fundamental question of how mentoring works has been often overshadowed by programmatic concerns about implementation" at the expense of what actually takes place between mentors and protégés in terms of goals and approaches (Balcazar & Keys, 2014, p. 83). Academic institutions (particularly school districts and universities or colleges) would therefore benefit from an examination of how student-mentors interact with protégés. This is particularly true for criminal justice, psychology, education, and social work majors whose future career will demand enhanced interpersonal skills for interacting with children at risk of making initial or repeat contact with the criminal justice system.

Known Benefits of Mentoring

Increase in federal funding for youth mentoring programs and research in the 2000s (Cooper, 2005) sparked a brief but intense academic interest in youth mentoring programs that targeted youth at risk of initial or repeat contact with the criminal justice system (DuBois et al., 2002). A review of recent publications on this subject shows continued support for early conclusions that mentoring relationships, activities, interventions, and policies do positively affect at-risk youth (DuBois & Karcher, 2014).

Furthermore, in the last two or so decades, the effect of mentoring on protégés has generated some research interests that have produced plenty of encouraging results that expand our understanding of the different types of youth mentoring programs, mentors, and protégés (Chan & Ho, 2008). Consequently, one of the areas in which a consensus seems to be forming in youth mentoring–related literature is around the conclusion that youth mentoring interventions improve prosocial attachments and trust (Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007) and enhance interpersonal skills and the ability to deal with social and emotional difficulties (Blinn-Pike, Kuschel, McDaniel, Mingus, & Mutti, 1998). Youth mentoring also assists youth in navigating the intricate process of transitioning from childhood to adulthood, reduces behavior-related problems (Ahrens, DuBois, Lozano, & Richardson, 2010; Bergerson & Petersen, 2009; Hughes et al., 2009), and helps adolescents overcome societal and relational adversities (Rhodes, Bogat, Roffman, Edelman, & Galasso, 2002).

Studies have concluded that mentoring programs inversely affect depressive symptoms, positively affect social acceptance, influence prosocial attitudes (Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman, 2013), foster caring, advance supportive relationships, promote active community involvement, and improve parent–child relationships (DuBois, 2002). Other studies have also found that mentoring enhances protégés' self-perception, interest in academic pursuit, motivation to learn, and academic performance (Linnehan, 2001). University-based youth mentoring in particular has been credited with the ability to reduce unexcused absences (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000) and school-related behavioral problems (Chan & Ho, 2008).

Studies that have looked at mentors' perceptions also agree that mentoring relationships benefit mentors immensely by providing them with the opportunity to learn about youth and their age-specific challenges (Philip & Hendry, 2000). Mentors also derive satisfaction from doing something worthwhile for young people, gaining insight into how young people think, improving interpersonal skills, building confidence about talking to young people, learning about different cultures and values systems, gaining knowledge about remodeling prosocial behaviors, managing relationships, and practicing counseling and prosocial coaching skills (Miller, 2004). Inductively these findings suggest that, consistent across programs, youth mentoring does a good job at affecting a wide range of protective and risk factors associated with success at school, correctional institutions, and other high-risk environments.

Mentoring Programs and Mentoring

Many institutions develop and run youth mentoring programs, but the majority of programs fall into one of three distinct categories: not-for-profit organizations—sometimes faith-based mentoring, government-sponsored or legislated mentoring (DuBois & Karcher, 2005), and university-based mentoring (Hughes et al., 2009). Not-for-profit and faith-based mentoring programs are typically characterized by religious and nonprofit institutions' financial, programmatic, and logistical support. This category of mentoring program generally targets disadvantaged and at-risk children from every geographical, cognitive, and behavioral background. Non-for-profit or faith-based programs are usually

driven by the desire to promote community services and civic engagement and to help youth overcome their cognitive and behavioral challenges (Fulop, 2003). This type of mentoring programs typically draw their protégés from groups that have already been identified by institutions within the criminal justice and public school systems as having specific cognitive and behavioral challenges or social needs.

Government-sponsored mentoring programs are created by legislative action or executive order. The programs draw mentors from a wide range of sources, including state and private institutions. Generally, government-sponsored programs target academic improvement and prosocial thinking and behaviors. Mentors are therefore expected to role model and provide supportive relationships that discourage delinquent, criminal, and antisocial thoughts and behaviors (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2012; Wilson, 2000). For these reasons, government-sponsored mentoring programs target at-risk youth in general but specifically those at group homes, detention centers, and those on probation and parole as well as those whose parents are incarcerated.

There is no recent research specifically on university-based school mentoring programs. However, university or school-based mentoring typically emerges as part of a credit-earning community service endeavor. Common aims are to give university students an opportunity to perform community service, expand their understanding of course materials, and enhance their civic engagement while helping children at correctional and academic institutions with cognitive, academic, behavioral, and other personal challenges (Hughes et al., 2009). These programs recruit their protégés from schools and other controlled environments including detention centers. Mentoring activities usually involve weekly meetings with protégés and the focus tends to be on academic improvement and behavior modification. The mentoring program that is the focus of this study falls into this category. The relationship-based mentoring serves children in an elementary, middle, or high school setting and also falls within the category of youth mentoring, which is characterized by a relationship between a youth younger than the age of 18 and a prosocial person of older age who intentionally wants to be a positive influence in the youth's life.

Irrespective of the type of program, most youth mentoring involves the traditional structured one-to-one relationship between a protégé and a mentor who are paired based on hierarchal order, with the mentors being more experienced or older than the protégés. A 2005 assessment of mentoring activities in the United States shows that 3,000,000 adults engage in mentoring relationships with children and that the average mentoring relationship lasts for about 9 months, while 38% of these relationships last for at least 1 year (Rhodes, DuBois, & MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2006). Each year, also, more than 4,500 mentoring programs sponsored by private and public institutions, including universities and schools, serve over 3 million children across the United States (DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2012).

Program Description

The typical private or government-sponsored youth mentoring program relies on mentors voluntarily signing up to mentor and then undergoing specific training that demands

a precise outcome (for example, Lakind, Eddy, & Zell, 2014). To the contrary, however, mentors in this program are university students majoring in criminal justice and who are compelled by the service learning requirements of their core courses to participate in the mentoring program that serves pupils from every school within a local school district. Each semester, undergraduate students enrolled in service learning courses are randomly assigned protégés in Grades 1 through 12 to mentor.

Protégés who participate in the program are referred by parents, class teachers, principals, and others school administrators because of behavioral problems exhibited primarily in the areas of attendance, poor grades, poor social skills, and failure to follow classroom instructions and general school rules regarding social interactions. Participation of protégés in the program is completely voluntary; therefore, even protégés who are referred to the program can opt out at any time by simply expressing a lack of interest in the program.

Student-mentors are advised during the first week of the semester to first establish healthy relationships with their protégés and then use the purity of those relationships to improve prosocial thinking and behavior. During the 55- to 75-min orientation session, mentors are also told to help improve their protégés' academic performance; assist protégés with school behavioral problems through listening, talking, informing, confirming, disconfirming, counselling, prescribing, and questioning behavior; and to set examples as adult role models. The orientation also stresses the need to instill in the minds of protégés the importance of education and the need to complete homework and to show interest in college education.

At least once a week, mentors meet one-on-one with their protégés and engage in a variety of activities including friendly discussions, working on homework, talking about personal issues, academic performance, postsecondary academic and career goals, behavioral challenges, and socializing on school grounds. The meetings take place on school grounds and during school hours and days. Very rarely, a student-mentor may obtain parental permission to meet his or her protégés outside school ground.

The program is unique for its emphasis on healthy relationships between protégés and mentors, the lack of specific behavioral outcome goals, its diverse protégé population that includes children from all groups, and the fact that mentors are future law enforcement employees who are learning to encounter children in various official capacities and who are receiving classroom lectures in matters relating to behavioral detection and modification. Consistent with social bond and social control theories, this program also emphasizes the development and maintenance of relationships between protégés and mentors and the use of the relationship to nourish healthy ties between the protégé and responsible adults and institutions.

Method

At the end of each semester, student-mentors complete a 35-item take home questionnaire. In addition to the demographic information that is collected, the survey asks student-mentors to (a) indicate their protégés' current status in the program by selecting "still in program" or "dropped out," (b) identify their protégés' "main problems"

Table 1. Student-Mentors (N = 155).

	Count	%
Gender		
Male	62	40
Female	90	58.1
Missing	3	1.9
Age		
20-22	95	61.3
23-25	44	28.4
26-28	12	7.7
29-31	1	.6
38 plus	2	1.3
Missing	1	.6

out of a list of 17 possible behavioral problem areas, and (c) to select out of possible 12 options "things" that they "worked on" with their individual protégés. In addition, the survey asks for four open-ended responses to what student-mentors did to help their protégés that worked, what did not work, what suggestions they have that would help the next mentor in assisting their protégés, and what challenges they encountered during the semester in relation to their mentoring assignments.

The question about what worked seeks to assess the type and number of interventions that work and are supported by existing research as being effective ways to promote prosocial thinking and behavior. The question about what did not work is designed to identify ineffective interventions and the extent to which the interventions are identified by existing research as ineffective. The question about what was challenging seeks to capture undertakings that student-mentors found to be difficult to achieve for whatever reason. Finally, the request for suggestions is intended to uncover the degree to which challenging interventions affect the choices student-mentors make about which issues deserve attention in a typical relationship-based mentoring encounter. This item also captures the level at which mentors recognize the importance of certain interventions irrespective of how challenging they might be.

The 155 survey data being analyzed were collected during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 academic years. As shown in Table 1 and 2, more than half of the student-mentors are females (58.1%) and 40% are males. About two thirds of the respondents are between the ages of 20 and 22, and 89.7% are between the ages of 20 and 25 years. Similarly, 40% of protégés are females and 58.1% are males. About 30% of protégés were between the ages of 13 and 18, and the majority, about 63%, were between the ages of 7 and 12 years.

Although not a sanctioned policy, the school district makes reasonable effort to minimize cross-gender matching. However, as male protégés (58.1%) and female student-mentors (58.1%) are overrepresented in the program (58.1%), some female student-mentors (18%) were matched with male protégés.

Table 2. Protégés (*N* = 155).

	Count	%
Gender		
Female	62	40.0
Male	90	58.1
Missing	3	1.9
Age		
4-6	3	1.9
7-9	42	27.1
10-12	55	35.5
13-15	26	16.8
16-18	20	12.9
Missing	9	5.8

Data Coding

Conventional qualitative content analysis methods were used to explore the self-reported responses to the four open-ended items. Thus, three coders, the primary researcher, one junior, and one senior undergraduate student, analyzed mentors' responses. The responses were typed verbatim by one coder and cross-checked for accuracy by the primary researcher. The data were then read word by word by all three coders for the purpose of gaining "direct information from study participants without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). Consistent with conventional content analysis procedures, the analysis of the responses involved the development of inductive categories as a result of the repeated reading of data to achieve thorough immersion.

Coders individually read the manuscript and then met as a group to systematically identify and classify themes and patterns of self-reported activities. Once the list of themes was agreed upon, coders individually coded the transcript and met on several occasions to combine and verify emerging themes. Consensus among coders was a key requirement at each level as a way of measuring how different audiences would interpret the responses that student-mentors provided. These methods are commonly used in qualitative studies to establish interrated agreement (see, for example, Moretti et al., 2011; Sanders & Cuneo, 2010; Sanger, Spilker, Williams, & Belau, 2007).

Data coding was concluded using grounded theory approach to identify emerging themes commonly shared by student-mentors and as reported in response to questions about approaches that worked and did not work, what posed external challenges, and what needed to be emphasized in future mentoring assignments. This process identified 14 themes for what worked, six for what did not work, eight for suggestions for next mentors, and six items for main challenges or successes.

The lists of distinguishable themes spoken of by respondents and compiled by each of the three coders were compared and reconciled until all coders agreed on the themes listed in Table 3. The final lists agreed upon were then used to assign values to what

Table 3. Themes.

Inductive categories		Examples
1. What did you do to help your protégé that worked?		
1	Academic work	Homework, enrollment in tutoring
2	Attendance	Tardiness and attendance
3	Behavior	Fighting, talking back
4	Rules compliance	School, public, and parental
5	Build school skill	Socialize with peers and staff
6	Conflict resolution	Resolve social conflicts
7	Organization	Helps manage school work
8	College and career	College- and job-related matters
9	Emotional support	Emotional and relational matters
10	Material rewards	Reward, bribe good behaviors
11	Punishment	Punishes bad behaviors
12	Social bond	Strong bond, and trust with mentor
13	Personal development	Mentees' personal interest
14	Others	Fall under two or more approaches
2. What did not work?		
15	Scheduling	Protégés or mentors' availability
16	Structured interactions	Involvement in school activities
17	Demanding improvement	Demand pass, good behaviors
18	Mentors' approach	Passive, disrespect, counseling, lecturing
19	Punishment	Punishment
20	Others	Fall under two or more approaches
3. Suggestions for the next semester in assisting this protégé?		
21	Academic work	Homework, improvement of grades
22	Behavior management	Work on disruptive behaviors
23	Structured socialization	Attend protégé class, lunch
24	Unstructured socialization	Interact outside class
25	Emotional development	Stay calm, deal with emotional issue
26	Parental involvement	Stay in contact with parents
27	Recognize improvement	Use praise
28	Others	Fall under two or more approaches
4. Main challenges		
29	Academic improvement	Immediate academic improvement
30	Scheduling	Conflict of mentee and mentor schedule
31	Mental health	Dealing with mental health issues
32	Behavioral change	Immediate behavioral improvement
33	Improving motivation	Confidence and motivation level
34	Other	Fall under two or more approaches

worked and did not work and suggestions, challenges, and success mentors self-reported. At the end of the individual coding, coders met several times to reconcile
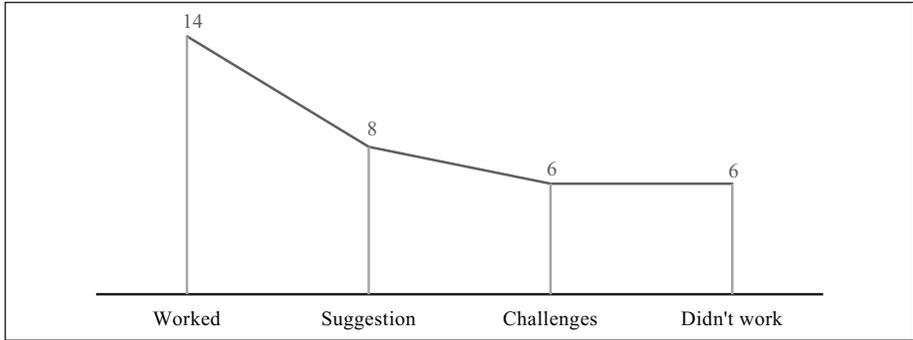
Figure 1. Typology of strategies and approaches.

discrepancies. In the end, the reported undertakings that did not gain unanimous agreement among coders were listed as "other" (see Items 14, 20, 28, or 34, respectively, in Table 3).

SPSS software was used to calculate simple frequencies for each objective undertaken or theme reported under each of the four categories. Reported themes for each section were coded as 1, and absence of each theme in each section was coded as 0 for the purpose of SPSS calculation. Thus, Tables 8 to 10 show the count and percentage of student-mentors who reported a particular strategy or approach that worked, did not work, need to be addressed, or posed significant challenge during the course of mentoring relationship.

Results

This study presents an understanding of how university student-mentors perceived their mentoring activities and interactions in terms of what worked or did not work during a semester of "relationship-based mentoring" interactions with their respective protégés. Student-mentors' perceptions of their interactions suggest that the informal mentoring characteristics of a relationship-based mentoring approach has the potential to produce meaningful results in a school-based youth mentoring relationship. This finding provokes interest in looking at the importance of emphasizing healthy mentor–protégé relationships and not setting specific goals for university student-mentors working with primary, middle, and high school pupils.

As shown in Figure 1, the results indicate that, overall, the number of objectives mentors pursued and achieved at the end of each semester was higher than those that were not achieved. The desire to help protégés achieve higher academic performance, improve personal behavior, self-development, and future planning was commonly pursued by the majority of mentors. Furthermore, the number of goals that were pursued and achieved is higher (14) than the number of those undertaken that did not work (six), and the number of suggestions for future improvement is also higher (eight) than the steps that did not work and the challenges (six) mentors reported. It

Table 4. Tasks and Strategies Attempted by Mentors.

Attitudinal change	Activities that are aimed at changing attitudes, thinking, and behaviors by rewarding or bribing good behaviors, recognizing and praising behaviors, withholding material kindness, and improving motivational levels
Emotional support	Interventions that focus mainly on emotional and relational matters and mental health–related issues, and support personal development and improvement of motivational and confidence levels
Social skills	Undertakings that seek to improve protégés' social skills, like conflict resolution skills, through protégés' structured and unstructured socialization with peers, mentors, and authorities
Social ties	Efforts that target the strengthening of relationships between the protégé and prosocial figures and support prosocial ties including bonding with mentors, school authorities, and parents
Academic output	Strategies that aim to improve academic output by focusing on protégés' school work, attendance, tardiness, college and career preparation, completion of assignments, and organization and management of school-related work
Behavior change	Approaches that target specific behaviors like fighting, talking back to authority, and noncompliance with public, school, or parental rules

therefore appears that the students in this study who were instructed to "first establish relationship and then use the relationship to promote prosocial behaviors," made a concerted effort to identify needs that are in various ways achievable.

Mentors employ diverse approaches and methods in response to a wide range of needs, behaviors, attitudes, and thinking, and mentors seem broadly cognizant of the effects of their interactions on their protégés' behaviors (Table 3). These approaches and interventions are overwhelmingly recognized by existing research as being effective ways to support prosocial development. This is also true about the specific strategies and approaches that mentors found to be difficult and the suggestions they put forward.

The focus of approaches and interventions mentors reported, as shown in Table 4, can be grouped under six categories, in order of which intervention informed what cognitive development and behaviors (a) change in antisocial thinking and attitudes, (b) emotional well-being, (c) social skills development, (d) healthy social ties, (e) good academic output, and (f) modification of antisocial behaviors. Consistent with existing research in this field, these interventions can lead to good social skills, healthy social ties, good behavior, improved relationships, academic success, and emotional well-being, which in turn inform prosocial thinking, behaviors, and lifestyles (Bohnert, Richards, Kohl, & Randall, 2009; Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012).

The scope of problem areas respondents addressed (Table 4) is very broad, both in terms of the number and strength of the risk and protective factors that they attempted to address. Specifically, mentors worked to facilitate academic output by helping their protégés with homework and enrollment in tutoring sessions, assisting protégés in

developing strategies necessary for avoiding tardiness and poor attendance and managing school work, and by helping protégés find answers to questions about college and future career requirements and long-term benefits. Mentors tried to modify behavior by targeting specific school behaviors like fighting, talking back, and failure to comply with school rules. They targeted the development of social skills necessary for conflict resolution and prosocial interaction with peers and adults by participating in structured school activities like attending classes and lunches in the company of their protégés.

Mentors also focused on helping protégés develop social skills by engaging in activities that involved talking with protégés about protégés emotional and personal relational matters and interests, and discussing topics designed to increase protégés' confidence and motivation levels. Mentors attempted to influence protégés' behavioral outcomes by counseling and lecturing protégés, praising and rewarding good behavior, demanding immediate behavioral improvement, and by practicing passive disrespect or showing lack of interest. They worked on improving their protégés' social ties by helping them maintain or repair relationships with parents and improve protégés' bonds with school, mentors, and the mentoring program.

Results also show that mentors in this program attempted to affect protégés through collaborative mentor–protégé efforts that worked, did not work, and that posed significant challenges as well as developed suggestions of strategies and approaches to be pursued in future mentoring relationships (see Table 3 and Figure 1). More specifically, a total of 14 unique interventions were reported as helping protégés during their participation in the mentoring program. Key among the approaches are interventions that targeted attendance, organization, specific behavior improvement, social skill development, and general emotional and personal development. Among all the approaches that were reported, respondents cited efforts to improve academic output, achieve behavioral change, provide emotional support, improve motivation level, and to come up with a convenient schedule as the main challenges they encountered.

In terms of what did not work, mentors reported mentor participation in structured and unstructured interaction in the company of their protégés and any form of punishment or withholding of material privilege and emotional comfort in demand for behavioral change—it is, however, the case that school rules regulate all interactions on school grounds; therefore, even unstructured interactions are somewhat structured if they occur on school property. Despite these challenges, participants suggested that future mentors devote more efforts to helping protégés with academic work, engaging in structured socialization with their protégés, recognizing and praising improvement made by protégés, and promoting parental involvement in their mentoring relationship with their protégés.

The survey asks student-mentors to identify from a list of problem areas that they considered to be their protégés' "main problem" areas based on the mentors' personal interpretations, observations, and experiences. Present in Table 5 is the distribution of what they identified as their protégés' main problem areas.

Obviously, Table 5 shows a wide range of behaviors identified as possible behavioral problem areas for protégés. Specifically, the majority of protégés were identified

Table 5. Protégés' Main Problems (*N* = 155).

	Count	%
Learning disability	145	93.5
Emotional problems	142	91.6
Uses profanity	142	91.6
Bullying others	141	91
Tardiness	135	87.1
Fighting	132	85.2
Absence from school	130	83.9
School rule breaking	127	81.9
Not getting along with peers	121	78.1
Communication problems	119	76.8
No interest in school	118	76.1
Poor grades	108	69.7
Anger problem	107	69
Others	99	63.9
Disruptive behaviors	91	58.7
Academic struggle	85	54.8

as exhibiting anger problems (69%), showing emotional needs (91.6%), repeatedly being tardy (87.1%), having frequent absences from school (83.9%), exhibiting learning disability (93.5%), showing other behavioral problems like bullying (91%), not getting along with peers (78.1%), fighting with other children (85.2%), breaking school rules (81.9%), and engaging in disruptive behaviors (58.7%). Similarly, a high number of protégés show academic stagnation or decline, sometimes evident by their failures to turn in assignments (63.9%), and poor grades (69.7%) results.

The end of semester survey also asks protégés to select the categories of interventions listed in Table 6 that they "worked on" during the course of their mentoring relationships. The result shows that the "things" protégés "worked on" during their individual mentoring relationships include different activities that are known for enhancing academic performances such as helping protégés with math assignments (37.4%), writing (69. %), reading (67.7%), other class assignments (31.6%), or learning exercise (59.4%). Student-mentors also involved their protégés in activities that promote interpersonal relationships, thinking, and behaviors as well as prosocial skill development activities that involve critical thinking games (78.7%), creative activities (65.2%), interpersonal communication (50.3%), and unstructured social interactions with their protégés (49%). In addition, student-mentors engaged their protégés in career-skill-related activities (85.2), and problem solving (52.3%).

Student-mentors' responses to question about program retention rates show that at least 87.1% of protégés stayed in the program for the duration of the semester-long mentoring relationship. Seven (4.5%) of the protégés dropped out of the program, and five (3.2) of mentors did not respond to the retention item. However, given that many events were outside the control of protégés or mentors, such as protégés' parents

Table 6. Interventions (*N* = 155).

	Count	%
Career skill activities	132	85.2
Critical thinking games	122	78.7
Others	119	76.8
Writing	107	69
Help with reading	105	67.7
Creative activities	101	65.2
Learning	92	59.4
Problem solving	81	52.3
Communication improvement	78	50.3
Playing together (unstructured)	76	49
Help with math	58	37.4
Help with assignment	49	31.6

Table 7. Challenging Interventions (*N* = 155).

	Yes	
	Count	%
Helping with class assignments	48	30.9
Targeting specific behaviors like fighting or talking back	80	51.6
Attending to emotional and relational matters including mental health issues	10	6.4
Targeting improvement of confidence and motivation levels	23	14.8
Scheduling conflicts	54	34.8
Other forms of interventions	98	63.2

Note. Yes = reported interventions that were challenging.

moving out of the local school district or the protégé dropping out of school, the low number of protégés who dropped out of the program provides reasons to conclude that student-mentors were reasonably successful at retaining protégés who joined the program. The high retention rate results also support the logical conclusion that perhaps the protégés and student-mentors had meaningful and supportive relationships.

Despite the fact that 30.9% of respondents (Table 7) reported "helping with class assignments" to be challenging, 30.9% recommended the same intervention as an effective way to guide primary, secondary, and high school pupils towards success (Table 8). Similarly, though 51.6% of respondents also reported similar patterns with regard to the designation of "targeting specific behaviors like fighting or talking back," "attending to emotional and relational matters including mental health issues" (6.4%), and "targeting improvement of confidence and motivation levels" (14.8%) as challenging interventions, they also reported in Table 8 (29% and 7.7%) the same behaviors as suggested approaches that should be taken by future mentors.

The percentage of respondents (30.9%) who found "helping with class assignments" challenging (Table 7) is almost the same as those who recommended the same

Table 8. Suggested Interventions (*N* = 155).

	Yes	
	Count	%
Helping with class assignments	48	30.9
Structured interactions with protégé	16	10.3
Unstructured interactions with protégé	37	23.8
Recognizing and praising good behaviors	17	10.9
Supporting emotional development	45	29.0
Improving parental involvement	12	7.7
Targeting specific antisocial behaviors	12	7.7
Other interventions	76	49.0

Note. Yes = suggested as possible interventions.

Table 9. Interventions That Worked (*N* = 155).

	Yes	
	Count	%
Establishing strong bond and trust with protégés	121	78
Helping with class assignments	97	62.5
Providing emotional support	50	32.2
Learning how to socialize with peers and staff	33	21.2
Learning how to resolve social conflicts	24	15.4
Targeting specific behaviors like fighting or talking back	19	12.2
College- and career-related matters	14	9
Organization and management of school work	13	8.3
Attending to personal development interests	13	8.3
Other interventions	11	7
Tardiness and attendance	9	5.8
Targeting specific rule (school or parental) compliance	9	5.8
Rewarding or bribing good behaviors	6	3.8
Punishment of unwanted behaviors	2	1.2

Note. Yes = reported as intervention that worked.

intervention for future mentoring assignments (Table 8). The number of respondents (6.4%) who reported "attending to emotional and relational matters including mental health issues" (Table 10) as a challenging intervention is much lower (29%) than those who see the same behavior as something that ought to be pursued by future mentors (Table 8).

It is also not surprising that the percentage of respondents (51.6%) who viewed "targeting specific behaviors like fighting or talking back" (Table 7) and "targeting

Table 10. Interventions That Did Not Work (*N* = 155).

	Yes	
	Count	%
Passive snub and lecturing as consequences of poor behaviors	111	71.6
Other forms of interventions	76	49
Structured interactions with protégé at school	36	23.2
Scheduling conflicts	29	18.7
Demanding passing grades or good behaviors	19	12.2
Withholding material kindness to influence behavior	4	2.5

Note. Yes = reported as intervention that did not work.

improvement of confidence and motivation levels" (14.8%) as challenging interventions is higher than the percentage of mentors (7.7%) who think "targeting specific antisocial behaviors" as an intervention would be beneficial to protégés (Table 8). Structured and unstructured socialization are good sources of healthy social skill development (Clark, 2010; Osgood & Anderson, 2004; Svensson & Oberwittler, 2010). However, when they are undertaken in pursuit of a therapeutic goal or with the intent to modify specific antisocial beliefs, thinking, or behavior, as is the case here, the effort can suffer from some of the challenges naturally associated with cognitive behavior modification approaches (Gaudiano, 2008).

Discussion

Clearly, irrespective of what interventions posed challenges and worked or did not work, student-mentors focused on approaches that have been identified as risk factors for antisocial thoughts and behaviors. For instance, studies show that academic improvement, increased motivation to change at-risk behaviors, enhancement of social skills, advancement of emotional well-being, and the expansion of social ties can mitigate the influence of key risk factors that inform substance abuse, criminal gang activities, bullying, violence, sexual offending behaviors, and other forms of delinquency and criminality (Bogart, Collins, Ellickson, & Klein, 2007; Gardner & Shoemaker, 1989; He Len & Steinberg, 2006; Rose & Espelage, 2012).

Efforts aimed at improving academic grades and related behaviors like attendance, management of school work, and completion of homework are associated with successful completion of high school and prosocial behaviors (Henry et al., 2012). Equally, emotional comfort and mental well-being in general are important requirements for the maintenance of good social ties with schools, parents, and social institutions such as mentoring programs that positively affect prosocial behaviors. A large body of research also shows that these factors are good predictors for attitudinal change, behavioral improvement, academic success, and prosocial lifestyle (Bohnert et al., 2009; DuBois et al., 2002; DuBois et al., 2011; Erdem et al., 2016; Weiler et al., 2013).

These results also support key findings that mentors who take part in youth mentoring programs experience personal satisfaction and acquire critical interpersonal skills (Balcazar & Keys, 2014; Bergerson & Petersen, 2009). Furthermore, the effects of mentoring are significantly enhanced "when strong relationships are formed between mentors and youth" (Balcazar & Keys, 2014; DuBois et al., 2002, p. 157; Portwood, Ayers, Kinnison, Waris, & Wise, 2005). In this respect, this study provides additional support for known benefits associated with youth mentoring, highlights the importance of informal relationships, and questions the roles conventional approaches like intensive training and mentor voluntariness play in successful youth mentoring. These contributions are discussed in subsequent sections.

Effects of Relationship-Based Mentoring Approach

The key premise of a relationship-based mentoring approach is the requirement to first build a relationship and then use the relationship as a resource to engage in undertakings that will help protégés. It is therefore logical to argue that relationship-based mentoring approaches at least as reported by mentees are partly informed by the inherent self-guided approach that concentrates more power and freedom in the hands of both the protégés and mentors, thus making it easier for both parties to arrive at what problems or needs are to be jointly addressed after first establishing trust and common interests. Such freedom allows both parties to make adjustments as needed to minimize the chances of devoting time and energy to something that may have less effect on the pressing needs of a protégé.

The strength of the relationship-based approach is also reflected in the high number of respondents who cited social bonding (78%), the highest in this category, as one of the interventions that worked (Table 9). The benefit of the relationship can also be deduced from the frequency reported for providing emotional comfort (32.2%), learning how to socialize with peers and staff (21.2%), and helping with class assignments (62.5%).

Another key feature of relational-based mentoring is the freedom to work on thinking and behaviors that the established relationships subjectively deemed to be worthy of attention in assisting the protégé. Inherent in that freedom is the responsibility to self-check or self-validate approaches by keeping account of what behaviors are being worked on, how it is being worked on, and what results are being generated. In this regard, the designation of the targeting of specific behavioral problems, such as fighting, talking back to authorities, or disruption of classrooms, as challenging and at the same time as interventions that work and thus should be pursued represents a recognition of the importance of each intervention, despite the challenges that come with trying to modify certain antisocial thinking and behaviors. Indeed, the diverse list of approaches and interventions also show that the freedom to act based on what an established relationship demands creates greater opportunities to work on what matters to the protégés and provides a wide spectrum of ways to address behavioral and attitudinal shortcomings.

As shown in Table 10, it is not surprising that approaches and interventions that conflicted with the goals of relationship-based mentoring did not work. For example,

structured interaction (mentor participation in school activities alongside protégés) is reported by 23.2% of respondents as an intervention that did not work. Interestingly, this intervention naturally undermined the unstructured nature of the relationship-based mentoring approach, which is based on informal relationships shaped by what each mentor and protégé find to be pressing needs at a given time. Similarly, one of the most logical explanations for the high number of respondents (71.6%) who reported that passive disrespect (passively snubbing a protégé as a means to change behaviors) did not work is that snubbing also undermines the very foundation of relationship-based mentoring, which is built on the overt expressions of care and respect.

Implications for Conventional Approaches

The purpose of this study was to develop understanding of the approaches criminal justice majors took and the behavioral goals and objectives they pursued during their semester-long relationship-based mentoring interactions with primary, middle, and high school pupils within a local school district. Results show that student-mentors overwhelmingly engaged in activities and employed approaches that addressed known risk factors associated with antisocial thinking, attitudes, and behaviors despite the lack of intense prementoring training and the mandatory nature of mentors' service. These findings are significant in several ways.

First, the approaches reported in this study cover much broader areas than other youth mentoring programs cover. For instance, in their introduction to the most contemporary *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*, DuBois and Karcher (2014) provide five distinct conceptualizations of youth mentoring: activity, relationship, intervention, policy, and societal-driven mentoring. It appears that the approaches reported in this study fall into two of those categories: activity and relationship. DuBois and Karcher (2014) conceptualize activity as a social interaction in which mentors provide to youth guidance and support that is designed to affect them in several ways. Relationship is described as "ongoing significant interpersonal ties" (p. 4).

Second, these results raise questions about the roles played by structured interactions in mentoring success. As Bergerson and Petersen (2009) argue, the "one finding common throughout the mentoring literature is that successful mentoring requires structured relationships with high expectations for mentors" (p. 59). On the contrary, one of the weakest approach mentors reported in this study was structured activities (see Table 9). The lack of support in this regard must however be viewed with caution. Obviously, there are differences surrounding what constitutes "structured activities." For example, while this study treats participation in school activities like attending classes and lunches in the company of protégés as structured activities, other researchers describe school cafeterias and playgrounds as less structured school settings (Pryce et al., 2015).

Bergerson and Petersen (2009) regard mentors' taking protégés to university campuses to socialize with faculty, staff, and university students as structured activities. That study concludes that structured activities are particularly helpful. It is also to be noted that Herrera and Karcher (2014) make a good point that generally an

"adult-youth relationship in schools connotes the roles of teacher, tutor, principal, or coach for the adult, and for youth, only pupil"; thus, the possibility for all activities on school grounds to be seen as structured activities does exist (p. 205). There is a distinction between "structured activities" and "structured environment" that may also explain the divergences. Structured activities refer to actions that are guided by specific rules. Structured environments are places where specific behaviors are warranted by specific rules. This study adopted the former, that is, not the environment but the activities.

Third, the success of mentors' efforts, as reported, raises questions about the importance of intense prementoring training, which studies regard as critical requirements for successful mentoring. For example, the New York City "chapter" of the Friends of the Children program requires its mentors to have bachelor's degrees, and previous experience working with vulnerable youth, to participate in a weeklong prementoring training and to attend several "ride alongs" with experienced mentors prior to taking on the role of youth mentoring (Lakind, Atkins, & Eddy, 2015, p. 54). Some training specifically targets goal setting, how to conduct specific activities, and how to talk about certain matters, build certain skills, assist students in the classroom, and help with school-related assignments (Balcazar & Keys, 2014; Portwood et al., 2005). The mentors in this study did not, however, undergo training beyond an hour-long orientation on how to comply with risk management requirements and why the development of relationships with protégés at the onset of the mentoring assignment was critical for successful mentoring experience, at least for mentors.

Finally, the "majority of mentors in today's formal youth mentoring landscape are volunteers" or are paid mentors (Lakind et al., 2015, p. 54). However, though studies report that most programs recruit volunteers (Balcazar & Keys, 2014; Portwood et al., 2005), the mentors in this study are in one way or another compelled by class requirements to participate in the program. This fact is crucial because it appears that voluntariness may not be particularly relevant in the context of a university-based mentoring approach as the mentors in this study were in one way or another compelled by class requirements to participate in the program.

Conclusion

This study provides an enhanced understanding of the design and implementation of university-based mentoring programs that broadly target elementary, middle, and high school children's anti- and prosocial thinking, attitudes, and behaviors, with emphasis on informal relationship between a protégé and university student—in particular, the emphases on the establishment of healthy relationships and then the use of the relationship to promote prosocial thinking and behaviors. School districts and colleges, as well as students of criminal justice, psychology, education, and social work whose careers are likely to lead to some form of increased interpersonal interactions with children at risk of making initial or repeat contact with the criminal justice system should therefore find a relationship-based mentoring approach helpful.

This study also provides reasons for further examination of key assumptions about youth mentoring, in particular the need for intense training, voluntariness, predetermined approaches, and the effects of setting narrow goals, prior to meeting with prospective protégés, for mentors to achieve. In addition, there is a strong need for future examination of the perceptions of protégés, with regard to what worked or did not work, and the relationship between the successes reported by participants in this study, and relationship-based mentoring approaches.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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