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Abstract: *Mentoring relationships are fraught with obstacles for both mentor and mentee. Despite challenges, these relationships provide assistance and guidance in ways not possible through other means. After the establishment of a theoretical framework for mentoring, the principles of community based participatory research(CBPR) are applied to a cross-cultural mentoring program between students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and students at North Star High School in Lincoln, Nebraska in an attempt to qualitatively analyze the program's benefits.*

Introduction

The challenges of immigrating into the United States are typically forced upon families who already face nearly insurmountable hardships. David Haines (1985) stresses the importance of general demographic status of refugees, such as age and sex, but also acknowledges a wide range of additional factors that can help or hinder the transition for both refugees and other immigrants. These include, but are not limited to, the skill sets the families bring, as well as the structure of the family itself and how well maintained that structure is after the resettlement. Horrific experiences in refugee camps, dangerous border crossings, and other life experiences shape the values and expectations of the people when they arrive; even the process of entering the United States is fraught with peril. Upon arrival, many find that the promised land of freedom is not without a price and the struggle to earn a living is hampered by cultural barriers, including language differences. As if all these factors were not enough, some of these individuals find themselves as adolescents tasked with plodding through high school.

Dr. Mary Willis and Dr. Barbara DiBernard have sponsored an internship at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) aimed at mentoring students from Lincoln Public School's North Star High

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School. This program enables "cultural mentoring," and cultural differences play a large, though not exclusive role in the mentoring process. The UNL student mentor and North Star student mentee are left to plan and execute weekly sessions with minimal supervision. While both are members of other communities, such as their respective educational institutions and ethnic groups as well as family and peer groups, in the mentorship they engage primarily with one another. Dr. Willis and Dr. DiBernard, as well as Virginia Saporta in the counselor's office at North Star, are always available to offer guidance, however, the final responsibility for the mentorship rests in the two individuals.

The immigrant and refugee experiences are difficult in the best of times, and these students often find themselves in less than ideal circumstances. The task of high school alone can be a burden, and when personal trauma, family troubles, and a heavy work load are added to the experience, things can quickly become overwhelming. It is for this reason that the mentoring program was created, but in order to analyze the program, it is necessary to understand mentoring and what the goals of cultural mentoring are.

Mentoring Theory and Purposes

Mentoring is a concept that has many definitions. Caffarella (1993:28) defines mentoring relationships as "intense caring relationships in which persons with more experience work with less experienced persons to promote both professional and personal development." Hansman (2001:3) elaborates on this definition, saying "that the main idea underlying formal mentoring programs is to help individuals grow, learn, and overcome obstacles," with a primary focus being on career, academic, and psychosocial development of the mentee (Hansman 2001; Allen and Eby 2004). This view of mentoring provides the necessary starting point for approaching a thorough examination of cultural mentoring. Many studies (Allen and Eby 2004; Barker 2007; Hansman 2001) draw a clear distinction between formal, prearranged, or assigned mentoring relationships and informal mentoring relationships that are more spontaneous and based on mutual interests. The UNL-North Star mentoring program clearly falls into the formal category. While the studies show that informal relationships tend to last longer than formal relationships, the amount of mentoring provided during the relationship is similar between the two types (Allen and Eby 2004; Barker 2007; Hansman 2001).

The aim of the UNL-North Star mentoring program is to assist non-native high school students as they adjust to life in the United

States. The program is not an attempt to force cultural assimilation upon the mentees with rigid, predetermined guidance. The traditional cultural values of the parents often shape the way in which the mentees experience the world, and in some instances ideas and concepts that are often taken for granted may be alien to them. The abrupt transition to a primarily English speaking culture, however, is not without effects. The children of the families often have an easier time learning English, and as such often find themselves playing the role of translator between their parents and other authorities, effectively reversing the traditional parent-child relationship. The children also find themselves caught between conflicting demands, with the traditional culture of the parents on one hand and the American culture on the other (Haines 1985). It is therefore the primary purpose of cultural mentoring to assist the mentees in navigating this difficult path. Each individual circumstance will be different, with variations in the desire to retain the traditional culture as well as the degree of identification with that culture, the English speaking ability of the mentees and their parents, and how adherent to traditional values the families are. Family structure also varies, with some families having been divided for one reason or another en route to the United States.

While the background of the relationship is crucial to the development of the mentor-mentee relationship, the mentoring process itself is more crucial to the development of the relationship. The cultural mentoring at North Star is no exception. In these delicate relationships, issues of trust and power are constantly in flux, as are the issues of racial and social status between the two involved, and these factors all influence the interaction between the mentor and the mentee. This interaction informs the mentoring process, and it is in this interaction that issues are addressed, priorities are set, and personal development, for both parties, is realized. There is no single set of rules for a mentor to follow.

Establishing the Relationship: Issues of Trust, Power, Gender, and Equality

Each experience is unique, and the mentor may be required to play many roles such as tutor, counselor, investigator, friend, and advocate. Certainly, mentoring is a daunting task, and when cultural differences are introduced, the task becomes even more complicated. The initial phase of a mentoring relationship must be spent building a foundation of mutual trust and respect between the two parties. Then the mentoring process must deal with power differentials between the

two parties, with the added cultural differences introducing the element of racial and social inequalities.

The first concern in starting the mentoring process is to build trust. Motives and goals, at this juncture, must take a backseat to the more pragmatic necessity of opening the lines of communication. This is a process greatly dependent upon the people involved, both in terms of individual willingness to trust and in the personal involvement in the relationship. Trust can be difficult to build between people and power and status issues may hinder its creation.

The nature of a mentoring relationship inherently involves a difference in power. While the individuals involved will each have their own experiences and views on each other, the very nature of a mentoring relationship is hierarchal, with the mentor in a position of power over the mentee (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero 2002). This inherent difference between the mentor and mentee is exacerbated by the racial and social differences that society imposes on both parties.

Racial and social inequalities permeate cultural mentoring efforts and hold a risk of undermining the entire relationship. These issues cannot be ignored, and attempting to do so would only cause them to smolder beneath the surface. Acknowledging these issues as an unfortunate reality is a vital part of bridging the gap. It is possible, and indeed necessary, for both the mentor and mentee to look beyond their societal roles and see the other as an individual, not as a representative of a larger community (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero 2002). Crutcher (2007) points out that while assumptions based on racial and social factors can help foster trust between people of similar position, in a cross-cultural relationship it often presents challenges. A delicate balance must ultimately be struck between this need to look beyond the racial and social factors present and the necessity of avoiding the unconscious racism offered by simply ignoring the inequalities (Chavez et al. 2003). Again, acknowledging these differences opens up dialog options for the mentorship partnership that can enrich the mentoring experience for both parties.

Gender differences also influence the path a mentoring relationship takes. In the UNL-North Star mentoring program, the pairs are matched by gender, with male and female mentors being paired with male and female mentees, respectively. Allen and Eby (2004) found that there is little difference between these same-gender relationships as compared to cross-gender relationships, and that if anything is true it is that same gender relationships have fewer obstacles facing them. One difference these authors found between male and female mentoring pairs was that the males involved in

mentoring focused on career or academic issues, while females in mentoring focused more on psychosocial aspects (Allen and Eby 2004).

Mentoring as Community Based Participatory Research

Community based participatory research (CBPR) often carries an implication of broad programs that gather a group of people together. However, size is not the important factor in CBPR. Even at the scale of two individuals, the principles of CBPR operate effectively. Despite the uniqueness of every mentoring partnership, cultural mentoring can be classified as a community based project with the community being a pair of individuals instead of a large group (Minkler and Wallerstein 2003).

Israel et al. (2003) identifies several key principles that define CBPR projects. By examining how the mentoring program at North Star High School fulfils these principles, its status as a CBPR project can be realized, which will assist in the difficult task of analyzing the program.

The first principle is that the community is a unit of identity. This principle traditionally considers which groups of identity are involved in the project, which can be misconstrued in the context of cultural mentoring. CBPR projects must build upon strengths already possessed by the community, rather than focusing on the weaknesses of the community. In the mentoring process, it is crucial that the mentor and mentee identify these strengths and weaknesses. CBPR emphasizes collaboration and encourage both parties to learn from the experience, as well as strive to achieve a balance between research and action. In this goal, it is important to keep in mind that the projects are not primarily research projects but rather are designed for the enhancement and improvement of the community and individuals involved (Stoecker, 2003).

Cultural mentoring is primarily aimed at helping the mentee adapt to a new, unfamiliar environment. At times this requires the mentor to be a tutor, at others a friend, and at others an advocate. All of these roles, however, share a common goal of helping the mentee, with the knowledge gained by each party occurring primarily to assist in this aim. Measuring such effects is one of the challenges of CBPR, and much of the measurement is by nature qualitative.

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To understand the mentorship program, including its strengths and weaknesses and it successes and failings, the context of its existence must be understood. This program is at a nexus of different groups, each providing its own context to the program. The city of Lincoln is the backdrop for the entire program, and the majority of the program's effort takes place at North Star High School; crucial to each mentoring effort is, of course, the mentee. While the mentors from UNL each bring something unique to the program, the majority of the program is directed towards the mentee. Each mentee has a different life story with varying struggles, issues, challenges, and achievements. While it is impossible to describe every scenario, overall trends and statistical demographics can shed light on certain aspects of these different stories.

Background

Lincoln, Nebraska, has been a site of resettlement throughout its history. The Lincoln Public School system has offered help to its non-native students by offering with English Language Learning (ELL) courses. Over the last decade, the percentage of students in ELL courses has steadily risen, reflecting the increase in both refugees and immigrants that have entered Lincoln (Table 1).

School Year	Number of ELL	Percent of Total LPS Students
1997-1998	849	2.8
1998-1999	995	3.3
1999-2000	1219	4.0
2000-2001	1509	4.8
2001-2002	1586	5.2
2002-2003	1657	5.4
2003-2004	1686	5.4
2004-2005	1722	5.5
2005-2006	1772	5.6
2006-2007	1870	5.7
2007-2008	2197	6.8

Table 1. English Language Learners (ELL) Student counts for past school years (Virginia Saporta, personal communication, 2007).

Lincoln's North Star High School was conceived in 2000, with the opening in 2003. The high school student body has 1740 students and 140 faculty members as of 2007. The school is ethnically and culturally diverse, with students from many countries. The racial breakdown of the student body (Table 2) gives a basic picture, but more detail is required, as the terminology of race fails to capture the true diversity that is present. ELL classes present an accurate snapshot of the student's nationalities and native language, although this data is for Lincoln Public Schools as a whole (Tables 3 and 4).

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Students
Caucasian/white	1221 (70%)
Native/American Indian	34 (2%)
African-American/black	180 (10%)
Hispanic/Latino	149 (9%)
Unreported	156 (9%)

Table 2. Racial/Ethnic composition of the North Star High School student body (Virginia Saporta, personal communication, 2007).

Survey Methods and Results

In order to analyze the cultural mentoring at North Star High School, a survey was distributed to all participants. The mentor and mentee versions of the survey each focused on similar topics, although the exact wording was different to better reflect the experiences of the participant. All data regarding the behavior of the mentoring pairs at North Star or quotations expressing opinions of the program or the participants are drawn from these surveys.

The surveys consisted of two parts. The first part asked the participants to rate statements from one (strongly agree) to six (strongly disagree). The second part offered open-ended questions, with the intent of encouraging ideas, concerns, and opinions to be freely expressed. The answers to the first part of the survey are graphically represented in Figure 1. The scores given are averages for the questions from all participants. The questions asked on the first part for the mentors were:

1) I learned a lot from the mentoring experience/found it helpful.
2) Being a mentor was often confusing or difficult.
3) I have a better understanding of the mentee's culture/experiences.

4) We felt comfortable around each other quickly.
5) Conversations were easy and enjoyable.
6) There were topics we were not comfortable discussing.
7) The student/mentee selected the discussion topics.
8) Since the beginning of the mentoring, the student's attitude/performance has improved.
9) Our communication improved over time.
10) We both contributed significantly to the conversations.
11) I led the discussions.
12) We focused primarily on academic work/studying.
13) I was involved in the mentee's affairs.
14) I could not rely solely on the information provided by the mentee.
15) I had to force the mentee to get things done.

Similar questions were asked of the mentees:

1) I learned a lot from the mentoring experience/found it helpful.
2) I was more open and honest later in the mentorship.
3) I have a better understanding of the mentor's culture/experiences.
4) We trusted each other quickly.
5) Conversations were easy and enjoyable.
6) I felt that I could talk about anything with my mentor.
7) I selected the discussion topics.
8) Since the beginning of the mentoring, I feel I have improved.
9) Our communication improved over time.
10) We both contributed significantly to the conversations.
11) I felt unimportant in the conversations.
12) We focused primarily on academic work/studying.
13) The mentor was involved in my every day life
14) We were never able to trust each other.
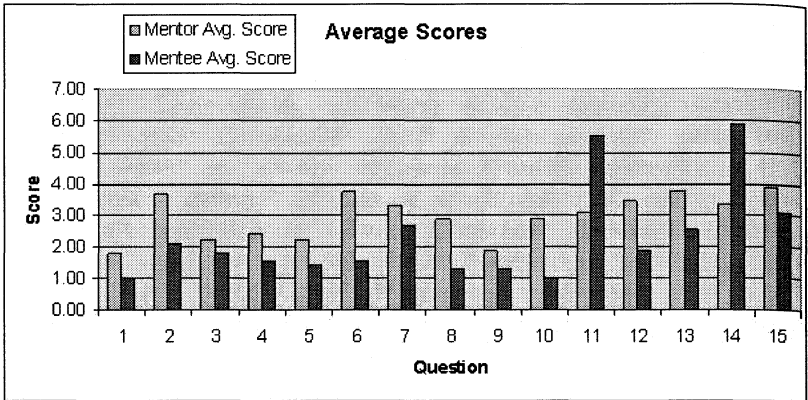15) My life at North Star has is better than it was before the mentoring.

Figure 1. Average question scores on mentoring survey.

Language	Students at North Star
Arabic	17
Burmese	1
Cambodian	1
Chinese	2
Dinka	3
English	1
Farsi	1
Finnish	1
Khmer	1
Kurdish	21
Nuer	3
Russian	9
Spanish	39
Ukrainian	3
Vietnamese	30

Table 4. English Language Learner (ELL) Program count by *language* for the 2007-2008 school year, as of September 28, 2007 (Virginia Saporta, personal communication, 2007).

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Nationality	Number of ELL students	Nationality	Number of ELL students
Afghanistan	10	Japan	6
Albania	4	Korea	6
Argentina	1	Kuwait	1
Belarus	1	Liberia	6
Bosnia	22	Libya	2
Brazil	4	Mexico	310
Burkina Faso	1	Myanmar	19
Cambodia	2	Nigeria	3
Chile	2	Oman	3
China	10	Pakistan	3
Colombia	2	Peru	6
Congo	15	Philippines	4
Costa Rica	1	Romania	2
Croatia	1	Russia	37
Cuba	2	Saudi Arabia	6
Dominican Rep.	1	Singapore	1
Egypt	2	Somalia	1
El Salvador	4	South Africa	2
Ethiopia	5	Spain	3
Finland	1	Sudan	147
Germany	3	Syria	5
Ghana	3	Thailand	2
Guatemala	17	Uganda	1
Guyana	1	Ukraine	30
Haiti	1	USA	1215
Honduras	4	Vietnam	121
India	5	Yugoslavia	1
Iran	1	Zambia	1
Iraq	127	**Total**	**2197**

Table 3. Count by *nationality* of Lincoln Public Schools students participating in the English Language Learner (ELL) Program for the 2007-2008 school year, as of September 28, 2007 (Virginia Saporta, personal communication, 2007).

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<u>Discussion and Analysis of Cultural Mentoring at North Star</u>

The cultural mentoring program at North Star High School demonstrates how mentoring relationships develop and how the principles of CBPR can be applied to these relationships. The surveys attempted to illuminate the issues of trust and power, and also sought to address any racial, social, or gender issues at work. The actual assessment of the cultural mentoring program is difficult, as all CBPR projects are. This program has been loosely organized for a relatively short period, and thus there are not many quantitative results to measure. Even with quantitative data, the true value and success of mentoring is best measured by the qualitative experiences of those involved, and expressions of how the program has benefited them. The quotations from the surveys seek to illustrate these intangible benefits and demonstrate that the program has certainly achieved success in helping the North Star mentees navigate through the many challenges they regularly face.

Mentoring Theory Put into Practice

In the cultural mentoring at North Star, trust accrued quickly over weekly meetings. While both the mentees and the mentors expressed some reservations, even stating outright that "there would be things she couldn't tell [the mentor]," most agreed that there was a mutual trust established within the first few meetings. While power differentials between the mentee and mentor existed simply by definition of the relationship, the impact on the overall mentoring process seemed to be minimal.

The survey results also reinforce the gender differences discussed by Allen and Eby (2004), with the males ranking the main issues addressed as academic in nature, particularly tutoring or homework related. The females ranked academic concerns in the mentoring lower than males, and even when they were important they also listed many other concerns, such as family and peer relationships. The female participants, both mentors and mentees, expressed a much greater degree of psychosocial mentoring, or "girl talk," than did the male participants.

While the concept of racial differences presented challenges in assessment, there were no directly observable issues brought about by these differences. Though this can easily be suspect, as these issues are notorious for their innocuous appearance, there was generally an expressed respect and admiration by both mentees and mentors for their

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partner, citing reasons such as "she is very strong [be]cause she goes to college and she has a family," "[my mentor] is someone I can rely on," and "I like my mentor and I will never change her."

Even with a solid mentor/mentee relationship established, the execution of that relationship can also prove to be a perilous road. The nature of a cultural mentoring endeavor requires that both parties contribute to the conversation, and the goals of the mentorship must be ascertained. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary that the mentee's strengths and weaknesses be examined, as well as the abilities of the mentor. The input of the mentee in the assessment is, of course, invaluable. This self-assessment must be tempered, however, as the information may not be entirely accurate, particularly since this assessment is occurring during the trust-building phase. Several mentors reported being unable to rely solely upon information received from the mentee, and found it important to verify the mentee's self-assessment with the official assessments available via the high school, including communicating with the teachers so that the view of classes is not skewed, as well as the mentor's own assessment of the mentee.

Once an accurate view of the mentee's status and abilities is gained, the pair must set goals for the mentorship. These goals should include the mentee's desires, and often the most valuable service the mentor can offer is listening. Other inputs into the goals include the high school faculty, who can offer insight into the mentee's performance and the mentee's family. If there are pressing issues, the mentor may have to take steps to ensure they are addressed. When mentorship pairs began setting goals for the relationship to achieve, many sources were used. The mentee naturally provided crucial input as to what they needed, and sometimes this was all that was required. Other times, the mentor found it necessary to check with the faculty of North Star to get a more complete picture of the mentee and used that information to help decide goals.

When these impeding obstacles are circumvented, the mentor/mentee relationship offers a unique relationship to both parties. The mentor's position entirely outside the mentee's normal contacts gives the relationship an angle like no other, as the mentor is neither an authority figure nor a peer. While this outsider's position can make it more difficult to build trust, it also gives the mentee an outlet for opinions and experiences that otherwise had no outlet, and otherwise hidden transcripts of the mentee's life become apparent. Both the mentee and mentor gain from this relationship, though. There are several crucial benefits that the mentor receives. There are of course the organizational benefits of the college credit, as well as the

intangible intrinsic benefits from the relationship. Also, the mentor gains a deeper knowledge of a different culture. While some of the mentees have experiences from across the world and in extreme situations, all of the mentees are able to teach the mentor's about a different aspect of life in the United States of which the mentor may not have been aware (Johnson-Baily and Cervero, 2002). While there is some necessity for the mentor to take charge of the meetings, both are able to influence the direction of dialog. Ultimately, the idea of cultural mentoring is not about tutoring, although that can certainly be a major part, but is instead about learning about the other's culture and experiences to become better adapted individuals. In the cultural mentoring experience at North Star, the general reported experience was one of collaboration in the experience. Even if the mentee or mentor primarily led the discussion, they both reported that contribution on both sides was invaluable. When asked if they felt unimportant in the conversations, the students all disagreed.

It is worth noting that the sea of mentoring is often stormy. Even if the challenges presented to the mentor and mentee are resolved, there are still many issues that may arise. The process of pairing a mentor with a mentee at North Star often takes time, with some pairs not meeting until late in the first semester of the two semester program. Also, arranging a time that is mutually convenient for the weekly meetings can be troublesome, as both the mentee's and mentor's class and work schedules must be taken into consideration. There have also been issues with maintaining the mentorship once the initial setup is completed. Mentees have missed meetings and even dropped out of school during the program, forcing the mentor to start the process of finding a mentee over again. Also, as Hansman (2001) points out, there are always ways that a mentoring relationship, like any other relationship, can fail. The arranged nature of the North Star mentoring relationships leave open the possibility that the pair will lack common ground or even be able to communicate effectively.

Participants felt the experience was great training and a great resource. Many expressed that the best part of the program was also the most difficult, and that they enjoyed "making a difference" and "the scary situations." A mentee was glad to "have someone to help me at this time." Both mentees and mentors also felt that personal improvement had been achieved through this experience, and expressed a hope that the same was true for the other party. One mentee felt the experience inspired her to believe "that anyone can go to college if you believe you can do it." Another said the "experience is great so far.

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It's HELPING!" [Emphasis original]. One of the mentors said "this experience changed my life."

Conclusion

Currently, the cross-cultural mentoring program at UNL is in transition. Organizational efforts are underway as the course assumes the status of a listed course as opposed to its former position as an "internship in anthropology." Undeniably, the program has had an impact on the lives of the students involved, both at North Star and at UNL. Many of the surveyed participants expressed that the areas in need of the most improvement are the structure and organization of the course and the matching time for mentor/mentee pairs. Also, many expressed a desire to increase the frequency of meetings to more than once a week. Hopefully, these concerns will be addressed in the future. Plans have been implemented to alter the organization of the course, and even to provide tickets to events, such as Leid Center and sporting events, for the mentee/mentor pairs. Also, as the program grows in complexity, it is possible that better tracking of data will allow for further incorporation of quantitative assessment in the future. Statistics such as grades and graduation rates, as well as other relative statistics, will assist future assessments greatly. However, it is important that the true success of the mentoring not be in numbers and graphs, but rather in the life experiences of the individuals involved and how the experience has improved their lives. Crutcher (2007) states that "students from all backgrounds benefit from effective mentoring, and we must find ways to mentor all of our students," and with the continued effort of the devoted faculty at both UNL and North Star, and the participation of willing and patient mentors and mentees, this program will persist in impacting the lives of students well into the future.

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