



At-Risk Student Mentoring Program

By David Patterson

Teaching young people to mentor and serve others as a gateway to accelerated academic achievement! The following project was piloted during the spring semester of 2000. The purpose was to accelerate the achievement of two distinct groups of students through mentoring service-learning. An older student with poor academic performance and severe behavior, discipline referrals and academic difficulties was one partner in this effort. He was taught to mentor/tutor a second grader with a similar profile. Preparation, Action and Reflection activities included the skills necessary for tutoring and reinforcement as an instructional strategy. Activity-based tutoring was also implemented for both students. This afforded the older student with the skills necessary to teach the younger child. Discussions also occurred as reflection activities. This work is supported by the Brandeis Report which calls for frequent and continued service-learning opportunities. Recommendation: it is crucial for this type of effort to include a collaborative problem solving approach with the grade level team.

Best practices:

- This project meets many needs of the community. First, it meets the needs of the child who is being mentored/tutored. The results are skill acceleration and improved self-concept of the student being mentored. The same thing occurs for the student completing their service-learning hours as a mentor. Very often, the older child with an academic deficiency can accelerate their own skills by teaching the very same skills to another person (Learning Pyramid Theory, 90% retention rate).
- Mentoring also clearly promotes the achievement of curricular objectives through the reflection activities that are designed to counsel the students as to the best strategies for keeping up with their schoolwork.
- Reflection occurs after each activity of mentoring. Time was built into the tutoring time (implemented during the older student's tutorial class period). During reflection, discussions centered on the events of the day and how to improve subsequent tutoring sessions.
- Student responsibility was very much a part of the data measure for documentation of the decrease in discipline referrals. Students seem to develop a "conscious" through this project.
- Community partnerships fill a wide range of needs. There was a partnership established between the two schools. Relationships were also established with the families of the children involved. Grants are awarded to quality programs by a variety of agencies. Highly functioning teams employ collaborative strategies that enhance the success of all. Teaching service-learning in this method can lead to other service projects within the school community.
- Planning ahead is a must. Working with the administrators of both schools is a proactive strategy that is helpful. Advanced planning needed to occur with the following people/staff: students, teachers, parents, and administrators.
- This project equipped both students (mentor/tutor and mentee/tutee) with the knowledge and skills needed for service. Ultimately, the younger student became a "helper" in a kindergarten class to work on letter recognition activities with the kindergartners. The older student engaged his own ideas about possible reinforcers to use with his younger schoolmate. He asked if he could bring game cards to give to his friend when he "was a good boy". Each time he worked with the student, he demonstrated increased independence at his job.