Homework Help is a youth assist program through Family Counseling Services in Cortland, New York, for which I volunteered with for my Writing Studies in the Community I service project. One of the problems I encountered during this project was when my mentee, “Luke,” was removed from his soccer team; he was exposed to the “No Pass/No Play” rule which states that if a student is failing his classes, he will not be allowed to participate in sports. The majority of schools are punishing poor-performing students who are involved in extracurricular activities by removing them from their activities with the hope “that such policies will serve as a motivational tool, providing the incentive for students to ‘pull up’ their grades” (Burnett, 2000, p. 2).

Contrary to this idea, many times when these students are booted off sports teams, they have no one to turn to for academic and emotional support; they may lose hope and give up on their education (Berlin et al., 2007, p. 85-97), so they drop out of school and get into alcohol and other dangerous drugs like the situation described by Burnett (2000): Jamar is an all-star basketball player who used basketball as a way to stay off the streets and away from his drug dealing friends. When basketball was taken away, he realized there is no way for him to get to college, so he dropped out and fell into drug dealing along with his friends. It is my fear that my mentee will end up reacting in the same way that Jamar did.

Accomplished educator Amy Rosewater (2009) claims that kicking a child off the team will also reduce any confidence he may have gained (p. 5). Berlin et al. (2007) refer to several successful programs designed to restore and maintain children’s confidence, and to encourage sports in young children’s lives. For example, the chart above shows the success of the Harlem RBI, a community baseball and softball program that is designed to keep kids off the street and give them the confidence to do well in school; similar programs are the Tenacity tennis program and the Hoops and Leaders Basketball Camp. The purpose of these programs is to encourage and inspire kids to do their best in every aspect of their lives, but particularly in their education.
*Homework Help* is a tutoring program designed to help students in their education to stay away from these situations through cross-age mentoring (in which an older student mentors a younger student). However, studies have shown that peer mentoring (same-age children mentoring each other) has a much higher rate of success when compared to cross-age mentoring (Wright, J., & Cleary, K., p.1, 2006). The program that I am suggesting is one based on peer tutoring among *teammates*, rather than cross-age mentoring. Luke might respond better to assistance from someone in his own age group because he would be more comfortable talking to someone who knows exactly what he is going through during this difficult time, rather than someone older who might not be as knowledgeable about his situation. Rosewater (2009) emphasizes the importance of empathy in peer mentoring, writing that this feeling of connectedness will help mentees (such as Luke) through the trying times in school and other aspects of their lives, such as trouble at home (p. 55).

The program I am proposing is an alternative to the “No Pass/No Play Rule;” allowing the student to participate with the sports teams, while using a peer mentoring method of education. Trebilcock (2007) emphasizes the benefits of peer mentoring when she points out that “a peer mentor can often get through to a child where an adult can’t” (p.56). This relationship between peer mentors and mentees benefits both parties, whereas a cross-age mentorship mostly benefits just one side: The peer mentor benefits in that he has the opportunity to help the peer mentee in a subject he is strong in, while also studying the material himself. Ideally, the peers will switch positions when studying other subjects. One drawback to this idea, however, is that peer tutoring does not expose mentees to the role model aspect of mentoring programs. Many times, interaction with college students provides this role model relationship.

Programs with college students mentoring middle school-aged children have been successful in keeping youth from falling under the influence of alcohol and other drugs and successful in other areas as well. One specific program in Missouri assigned youth a “tracker.” A tracker is a college student trained to help unruly youth find the path that is best for them. This includes making sure that the child is home on time, does his homework and helps his parents around the house. These rules help the child know that someone is caring for him, and in turn the college students become the youths’ role models (Steward & Weimholt, p.28, 1994).

Good role models provide a mentoring program with a key component necessary for child development. Role models provide the personal aspect of mentoring, dealing more with life and relationships than tutoring. The students’ lives would not change without the influence of a successful individual helping them find their way through life. While the peer mentoring program I am proposing does not require as many college students as the *Homework Help* program, it would still be beneficial to both

A college student could be a useful resource during the proposed team homework meetings by assisting the peer mentors when no one on the team can figure out a problem with the student’s homework, while also giving special attention to students with educational or personal issues. The minimal amount of cross-age tutoring will be helpful when it comes to difficult issues in homework and also larger life issues, such as parent issues, peer pressure, and other important teen concerns that college students can help deal with.
The implementation of peer mentoring programs is saving many schools a lot of work: When the students are learning from each other, the school has to spend less money because it is using volunteers rather than paying a teacher or a teacher’s aide, while still achieving the same outcome (Wright & Cleary, p. 7, 2006). Wright & Cleary (2006) add that many schools do not have the resources to give every individual student the attention needed for the student to succeed, but peer tutoring fills this void in education by having classmates pay special attention to each other while still using the college students as the role models for the students (p. 7). This experience benefits the peer mentors and the volunteers.

College students will gain the same benefits of educational advancement and learn to be good role models in this new program as they would in Homework Help. They will gain the same amount of experience with children in the middle school age group, while making relationships with more than one student. The college students will also gain experience in the fields of childhood education and psychology while creating connections and building relationships with the students on the athletic team. The benefits for college students and athletes make a peer mentoring program seem like a good idea for those students in positions similar to my mentee’s.

References


