The Community's Perspective on Mentorship through Service-Learning: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

　　Service learning (SL) works to foster companionship between the student and the community partner (CP). While this form of integrative education has gained increasing popularity within secondary and postsecondary curricula, especially during the recent pandemic, its effects on the CP are insufficiently explored. One such form of multidisciplinary education includes youth tutoring and mentorship, where the SL students and CP students learn and teach from each other, fostering reciprocal interaction. Although a significant aspect of SL is geared towards the CP, there is a lack of research considering the perspectives of the CP regarding SL. This study aims to address this gap in knowledge by elucidating the CP students' perspective regarding SL and how SL can be improved in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Intake surveys and structured interviews were conducted with Cosumnes Oaks High School CP students in a Medical Careers Pathway in the Sacramento, CA region. Responses shed light on how engagement with SL affects these students and gauge how the SL curriculum can be better adapted to meet their needs. We also explored how the COVID-19 pandemic affected CP students' academic experience and how they believe SL modalities can be adapted based on the global pandemic. Based on the study, three themes were identified to describe the benefits of SL for CP students and to modify SL to better suit the needs of the student based on their experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic. The results from this study suggest that students believe SL mentorship has the potential to provide mentors

who are able to support them, improve their academic achievement, and connect to others from different backgrounds/ experiences. The themes generated by this study will benefit educators who adopt SL into their curriculum and help CP students receive SL mentorship that is catered to their needs and fosters their growth. Within the research community, this study will also serve as a model to inform future SL research study designs to put a greater emphasis on the CP's perspective.

Key Words: Service-learning (SL), student perspective, self-efficacy, academic achievement, cognitive engagement, tutoring, mentorship

Background

Service-Learning (SL) has become increasingly prominent within secondary and postsecondary curricula (Fertman, 1994; Lankard, 1995; Jolliffe, 2001; Smith, 2008; Celio et al., 2011; Cress et al., 2013). SL is an interdisciplinary form of education that fosters a bidirectionally beneficial relationship between the SL student from a host institution and the community partner (CP) (Cashman & Seifer, 2008; Cress et al., 2012). This educational approach seeks to inform how the SL student addresses the community's needs and promotes authentic relations between the two parties (Rosenkranz, 2012). Within academic settings, SL combines specific course learning objectives with community service to give SL students opportunities to cultivate their civic knowledge and interpersonal skills (Cashman & Seifer, 2008; Cress et al., 2013). Meanwhile, for CP students, or those who receive service in an SL program, SL creates an open atmosphere where they can exchange their perspectives and skill sets with individuals providing service (Rosenkranz, 2012; Cress et al., 2013). Effective SL necessitates collaboration between the SL student and CP student to ensure mutual benefit and understanding and also help ward off the server-served dichotomy (Flower, 1997).

Eppler, Ironsmith, Dingle, and Errickson (2011) explored this concept of mutual benefit as they evaluated the effects of an SL tutoring program on tutors and tutees. Compared to students who did not participate in SL, the college tutors in the study showed increased motivation to volunteer and enhanced self-esteem as a result of the program. Meanwhile, for the elementary school tutees, the number of tutoring hours was positively correlated with increases in their reading scores. Additionally, their achievement goals were higher compared to the beginning of the school year. This suggests SL's ability to provide reciprocal benefits to both tutors and tutees. Although direct service through mentoring and tutoring is expected to benefit CP students, most SL research in this field has focused on SL students.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional teaching norms that students had grown accustomed to, impacting CP students in multiple ways (Daniel, 2020). The pandemic impacted connection with others, and SL has the potential to bridge this gap as our world returns to a new normal. Understanding the effects of COVID-19 on CP students' education and their perception of SL can provide valuable insight for SL delivery in tutoring CP students as well as education delivery in general.

Exploring the Literature

Previous studies have examined the effects of participating in these programs for tutors and mentors, particularly in three categories: perception of self, academic achievement, and cognitive engagement (Celio et al., 2011; Weiler et al., 2013; Whitley et al., 2017). What follows is a discussion of studies that found improvements in these three measures for SL students. In addition, literature that shows the potential for CP students to improve in these areas is also examined.

Category #1: Self-Perception

The first category is self-perception, which includes self-efficacy and self-esteem. For this study, we use Bandura's (1977) definition of self-efficacy as an individual's perceived ability to execute behaviors needed to achieve a larger goal. Additionally, we use Sigelman and Rider's (1999) description of self-esteem as a practical evaluation of one's qualities and overall worth. For example, when college students from Campus Corps participated in a structured SL course and mentored youth, they scored higher on post-intervention surveys that measured self-efficacy, self-esteem, interpersonal and problem-solving skills, and civic action compared to those who did not have SL experiences (Weiler et al., 2013). In addition, in their study of how an SL program influenced Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) students' Effective Personality (EP), Chiva-Bartoll, Baena-Extremera, Hortiguela-Alcalá, and Ruiz-Montero (2020) found significant increases in the students' social self-realization, self-efficacy, and the ability to cope with challenges. Returning to Bandura and Sigelman & Rider's definition, these studies suggest the power of SL programs to improve students' perception of themselves and their abilities in social and academic contexts.

SL programs may also contribute to improvements in CP students' self-perception, and one principle of SL, reciprocal learning, can help inform this relationship. In reciprocal learning, the tutor and tutee continually switch roles and mutually learn from one another (Warter & Grossman, 2001). For example, Miravet, Ciges, and García (2014) asked pre-education students in discussion groups to share their thoughts on how reciprocal peer tutoring affected their self-concept and attitudes toward solidarity. They found that after completing the peer tutoring program, the students expressed greater self-confidence after taking turns acting as the tutor and teaching their peers challenging concepts. d'Arlach, Sanchez and Feuer (2009) similarly found that after participating in a language exchange program with English-speaking university students, Spanish-speaking community members reported feeling greater confidence to speak up and share their input with their university partners. When both SL and CP students take turns being the expert, the latter group is able to equally contribute to the knowledge creation between the two parties (Shah, 2020). Placing value on the CP students' perspectives encourages them to feel that same value internally, which can then help improve their self-perception.

Category #2: Academic Achievement

The second category, academic achievement, primarily comprises quantitative measures of students' grades and test performance due to participating in SL activities. Based on narratives from an undergraduate SL course, undergraduate students who mentored high school students showed an increase in their grade point average (GPA), interpersonal skills, and self-understanding (Whitley et al., 2017). Additionally, Phakakat and Sovajassatakul (2020) found that university students enrolled in a hybrid SL program scored significantly higher on academic achievement and critical thinking tests than those who engaged in conventional learning. As the researchers noted, SL allows students to apply classroom concepts to real-world settings in the community, with whom they can collaborate to achieve a common goal. Identifying a common goal would facilitate SL students' general learning process and can thus explain how SL programs can enhance their academic achievement.

Regarding the CP student's perspective, it is commonly held that tutoring can positively impact their academic performance. In a study of cross-age tutoring in mathematics, Watts, Bryant, and Roberts (2019) looked at the effects of a tutoring program on both tutors and tutees. Fifth- and

sixth-grade student tutors with emotional-behavioral disorders (EBD) were tasked with guiding kindergarteners struggling with numeracy skills (e.g., counting) in a number line board game. Two of the five tutors showed a decrease in risk status for externalizing behaviors in EBD, and the kindergarteners showed moderate improvements in numeracy skills from baseline (Watts et al., 2019). While this study suggests the potential for tutors and tutees to benefit from cross-age tutoring, the academic achievement of tutees in an SL program is not well-explored.

Category #3: Cognitive Engagement

The third category, cognitive engagement, refers to students' thoughtfulness and willingness to master complex skills (Fredricks et al., 2004). Li, Guo, Yao, Wang, & Yan (2016) reported that the value college students assigned to performing an SL activity predicted their level of cognitive engagement or ability to significantly regulate their learning and apply cognitive strategies in the activity. In other words, the more benefit they perceived from carrying out the SL activity, the more cognitively engaged they became. In a meta-analysis on how SL programs affect student outcomes, the study showed that, compared to controls, SL students experienced significant gains in multiple categories, such as academic achievement and attitudes toward school and learning, the latter of which includes cognitive engagement as a measure (Celio et al., 2011). SL thus appears to exercise and even increase students' ability to put forth the cognitive effort to accomplish a given task, whether in the context of serving community members or learning in a classroom.

The effects of SL on the cognitive engagement of CP students have also been explored. For example, as part of an SL program, elementary school children tutored by college students in reading showed increased levels of achievement motivation, or response to a challenge, by the end of the school year (Eppler et al., 2011). The improvement in cognitive engagement indicated most children (8 of 10) changed their preference from solving an easy puzzle (8 pieces) to solving a difficult one (24 pieces). This study is the only one that has explored the relationship between tutoring and achievement motivation, which is related to promoting cognitive engagement in children through an SL lens—demonstrating an increased need to consider the CP student's perspective in order to positively impact their persistence in academic challenges.

As the current literature has shown, both SL students and CP students stand to benefit in the areas of self-efficacy, academic achievement, and cognitive engagement. Past studies have demonstrated the beneficial aspects of SL to students participating in SL classes and actively serving the community. However, the literature shows a need to better understand and elucidate the perspective of the CP students, which has not yet been as thoroughly explored, especially in the context of COVID-19. To learn more about the CP student perspective, interviews and questionnaires were administered to high school students. The responses were qualitatively analyzed to determine the CP students' perspectives on the benefits of SL and how SL can be improved.

Methods

Site of Study and Participants

This study was conducted with our community partner (CP), Cosumnes Oaks High School, located in Elk Grove, California, and their Medical Careers Pathway, a specialized program for high school students interested in pursuing a career in the healthcare field. Convenience sampling was used to recruit six students from this pathway; 5 identified as female and one as male (Sedgwick, 2013; Emerson, 2015; Etikan et al., 2016). The age range of the student participants

was 15-17 years old, and their grade level fell between 10th to 12th grade. Each of the participants had a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or above.

Ethics Approval

Our study involved human participants; thus, we gained appropriate approval and consent before conducting the study. As a part of the approval process, it was ensured that each researcher had completed the necessary courses and attained the proper certifications from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. In addition, since the student participants were minors, consent of participation from the parents or guardians and assent of participation from the students was acquired. This study was also approved by both California Northstate University's Institutional Review Board and Cosumnes Oaks High School. Finally, a Memorandum of Understanding was established between the researchers' and participants' institutions to confirm the responsibilities of the partnership.

Data Collection

The research design involved a mixed-methods study consisting of the use of quantitative data from questionnaires administered as well as the qualitative analysis of interviews conducted by each of the participants (Josselson, 2013; Seidman, 2006). The quantitative portion of the questionnaire involved its ability to allow the participants to assess their school-related habits, perspective on service learning, and effects of the pandemic via a 5-point rating scale. The qualitative portion of the study includes the conduction of interviews where the participants had free reign to express their narratives, opinions, and experiences. The particular SL interventions of interest that were presented to participants in both the questionnaires and interview questions were tutoring and mentoring. Framing our questions using SL-based tutoring and mentoring served to make the discussion of SL more directly applicable to the participants. The students who administered the questionnaire forms and conducted the interviews either attended or had graduated from California Northstate University College of Health Sciences at the time of data collection.

Pre-written, universal questionnaires were provided to the CP students before completing an interview. In addition, a paragraph description of SL was provided in the introduction so that the students would have a general idea of how this study defines "service-learning." Using a Likert-type scale, the questionnaire responses provided background information on participants' school habits, previous experiences with receiving academic assistance and mentoring, and perspectives on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their education. For questions of interest, we tallied the ratings provided by each participant and included these totals in the results section. This allowed us to evaluate the CP students' interest in school and extracurricular activities, background knowledge of SL, and perspective on the shift to a virtual learning modality. By doing so, we were able to acknowledge that the results of our study are impacted by the unique characteristics of our specific participant pool and may not be representative of other populations with different academic experiences.

Following the administration of the questionnaire, the three student researchers, Mohini Vadalia (MV), Anhtho Tong (AT), and Bhagvat Maheta (BM), as well as their research mentor, Assistant Professor Gloria Poveda (GP), conducted qualitative interviews that lasted approximately 15-40 minutes via Zoom, in which the interviewer defined the concept of SL, provided a few examples, and asked the students pre-determined questions. The questions were targeted toward understanding the student perspective regarding the involvement of a tutor/mentor

present within their academic lives and the roles of external assistance/intervention in their life course. We also specifically asked for their thoughts on SL as well as how they believe SL can be improved. Finally, we gave all the students the opportunity to speak on how they believe the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning impacted their academics and how they think SL should (or should not) change in response to the year and a half in self-isolation. The questionnaire and interview guide used for data collection can be found in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

After each interview, two of the student researchers independently coded the transcribed interviews, adding them to a codebook of common themes (Josselson, 2013; Seidman, 2006). The group met every week to discuss the codebook and finalize the themes through an iterative process. This process continued until thematic saturation was found and consensus amongst the researchers was reached.

While each of the questions posed within the questionnaire form, as well as the interview, hold value towards gaining better insights into the student perspective, the specific questions selected for deeper coding and analysis were based upon their relevance to the three overarching themes of self-efficacy, academic achievement, and cognitive engagement that this study seeks to explore. The chosen questions and their responses, as indicated in Appendix A, allowed us to also characterize the CP students' perspective on tutoring, SL, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their academic experience. Nevertheless, the questions that were not selected allowed us to gather pertinent background information on the CP students' academic strengths and weaknesses, academic motivations, school habits, level of understanding of SL, and SL's impact within an academic setting.

Results

Questionnaire responses can be found in Tables 1 and 2. 3 CP students have "received academic assistance from a tutor at one point in time," while three have not. When asked what traits they would look for or appreciate in a tutor during the interview, the CP students' responses included someone who is supportive, patient, adaptable, motivational, and trustworthy. Student #6 noted that they would appreciate "*someone with a lot of patience because it takes me a really long time to understand things.*" Meanwhile, Student #1 responded:

> *I want someone who is not afraid to push me to be better… enough to where I am stepping out of my comfort zone and learning something. I also want someone who isn't very strict in a sense to one method of teaching, and they are open to new ideas and maybe new styles.*

According to the questionnaire responses, all 6 CP students reported that they either often or always '*aim to earn good grades in the classes they take'* and that they '*alter their study habits after receiving an unfavorable grade on an exam*.' During the interviews, the students were able to expand on this and reflect on what types of support would be conducive to their success and how SL would factor in. For example, three students felt that SL would benefit their academic performance and motivation. Student #4 noted, "*[SL] will make me more excited or interested in subjects I'm learning, and it helps me understand them better.*"

This bi-directionality of SL appears to be especially important for some students in improving their academic performance, as two of them used an iteration of the phrase "two-way street" to depict SL in their responses. In fact, Student #1 noted:

I think [SL] definitely benefits because it is very interactive because you are learning through teaching ... it motivates both sides to put an effort in ... It is not a one-way street… which promotes communication and growth in terms of academics.

In addition to Student #6, 1 other student also felt that SL would increase their overall confidence in school. When asked how SL would affect their academics, Student #5 also indicated that they believe they would experience a confidence boost as a result of SL:

In terms of academics, I think it would improve… and confidence-wise, I think it would bring a lot more confidence in me because I'd have that relationship, a two-way street with whoever's teaching it or with my mentor… I think it would motivate me to be more active and participate in school.

In addition to Student #6, Student #5 not only demonstrates their perspective of SL resulting in an increase in confidence but also correlates the reason for the confidence boosts to SL being a two-way street between the mentor, or the SL student, and the mentee, or the CP student.

Moreover, Student #3 claims that "*service learning definitely helps what I am doing in regards to service*" because it allows them to "*learn how I can improve my own academic life.*" Student #3 continued their response by sharing a personal anecdote about the effects of SL not only on their academics but their ability to connect with individuals from different backgrounds:

I was tutoring a little girl… She was actually struggling with memorizing things. I was at the same time struggling with memorizing… I asked her, 'What do you enjoy doing that takes steps to do?' She said, 'I like singing.' And then I said, 'Make it into a song.'... I had a science test the same week, and it was really hard to memorize what I had to be tested on… I enjoy dance; maybe that will help me with the way I present

Student #2 also discussed how SL provides the opportunity to increase cultural awareness: "*I am learning about other cultures, and other cultures are also learning about my culture.*" In a similar light, two other students noted that SL fosters cooperation and active communication. One included Student #5, who noted:

[SL] seems very cooperative, and a lot of careers in the future and in my own goals; it requires teamwork, it requires cooperation with other people. And I feel like this would build better communication skills… and overall active listening.

The perspectives provided by Students #1, #2, and #5 supply support for our determined theme 2, which addresses academic improvement as a consequence of SL, and theme 3, which describes SL as being able to stimulate a cooperative and intercultural environment.

The CP students' perspective on their academic experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic was also explored. Based on questionnaire responses, only 2 CP students reported

always '*having a designated space at home that is quiet and organized for studying and working*.' Additionally, five students found that their high school academic experience had changed with moving to an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 1 of them relaying that it had worsened overall. A space was provided on the questionnaire for the students to elaborate on their answers, and responses included struggling with online learning, facing social isolation, and feeling decreased motivation. Student #4 shared, *"I did not really learn that much over the course of online learning. And I was also isolated from my friends and teachers."* Moreover, Student #5 discussed experiences of Zoom burnout and suggested that adapting the teaching style and delivery could have helped address it. When asked, "How can members outside of your community best serve you to achieve your vision?" Student #5 provided that the primary responsibility of SL students is to listen to the voices of the people they serve. They explained:

> *A lot of the time, our administration and people outside love to say, 'we're going to help the students,' but they never really try to get a student's perspective on things. A lot of the meetings and councils held to make certain legislation or certain rules, they're always leaving out the students. They'll give us a little survey and have us say some things, but we don't really know if what we're saying is being held to any weight up in their meetings.*

While a majority of the responses from other participants regarding this interview question focused on community members aiding their vision by sharing their experience, advice, knowledge, and motivation about their profession, Student #5 had a slightly different approach to answering this question. Student #5 emphasized an issue that they personally witnessed and experienced. They shed light on how community members can better refine their policy to increase the trust of the students and enhance the aid that they provide to tend to the specific needs of the students.

Table 1. School Habits Questionnaire Responses

Self-Assessment of School Habits	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always
Statements	**Participant Ratings**				
1. I participate in one or more extracurricular activities.		I		II	III
2. I prioritize academics and extracurricular activities equally.		I	II	I	II
3. I aim to earn good grades in the classes I take.				I	IIII I
4. I ask questions in class when I find a concept confusing.		I	II	I	II

5. As a student, I am self-aware of both what I am good at and what I struggle with.			II	II	II
6. I alter my study habits after I receive an unfavorable grade on an exam.				IIII I	I
7. I keep a planner or agenda to track various dates and deadlines.	I	I	I	II	I
8. I have a designated space at home that is quiet and organized for studying and working.			II	II	II

Table 2. Service-Learning Questionnaire Responses

Service-Learning	Yes	No	N/A
1. Are you familiar with or have a general knowledge of service learning? If yes, please explain below.	III	III	
"Service learning can vary between any acts of service that you are learning in order to provide for other people. As you are learning skills, you at the same time take those skills to teach or help others." "It's a type of learning that combines academic courses with community service in order for students to gain an understanding of the course and meet social needs." "Yes, I know that it is learning skills or information by doing community service acts."			
a. Have you ever had experiences with service learning? If yes, please explain below.	II	IIII	
"In both Elementary school and Middle school, I had participated in indirect, direct, as well as advocacy service." "I am involved in the Medical Careers pathway at my school. This is a great opportunity for me to explore the careers that interest me and also learn and reflect from it."			
2. Have you ever received academic assistance from a tutor?	III	III	
a. If yes, do you feel that such a tutoring experience(s) benefitted your academic performance?	III		
3. Are you currently receiving academic assistance from a tutor?	I	IIII I	
4. Do you have a mentor(s) whom you admire and/or receive guidance from?	IIII I	I	
a. If yes, do you feel that your mentor(s) has benefitted	IIII	I	

your academic and/or personal growth? If yes, please explain below.			
• "I am guided by peers and adults, as well as successful people in my life; I'm sure they appreciate that I am doing well in life." • "I think they have benefitted me because I've been able to analyze and study their work ethic and was/am able to apply it to my own. In many ways, my mentors taught me to acknowledge my strengths and apply them to my weaknesses." • "Yes, my counselor and also my Medical Pathway instructors. They benefit my academic and personal growth because they provide me a lot of help and guidance relating to the Medical field and my High School experience." • "The mentors from my Medical Pathway helped me to realize that I don't have to go into Biology to become a medical professional. They taught me how to balance my life with fun and studies."			
Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic			
1. Has your high school academic experience changed with moving to an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, please explain below.	IIII I	I	
• "I've become generally more laid back with my studies. I don't study as hard as I used to since I got used to being able to do it all at home." • "There was not as close of a connection with teachers and peers. There was limited class time and it was hard to reach out and ask questions. Some courses were much easier due to workload and being able to type responses. I was able to attend more clubs and "multitask" with meetings and extracurriculars. In harder courses it was less clear and harder to understand the material. They're [*sic*] also wasn't much physical activity so it was difficult." • "Going from learning online back into person in what at the time felt like a very long process, seems to feel much shorter now. The effect of learning online versus in person made me someone who uses her resources more rather than trying to memorize every single thing taught to me anymore. Before it wasn't a big thing for me resulting in searching something up, though during the online school process I was so connected to taking the easy route and doing less work than I would have in person. In person at the moment is not going as well as it has in the past, I am struggling a little more than usual, and I don't know if it's coming more from the grade level adjustments or the transitioning back from everything." • "Yes, a little bit. For the hard classes, it's kind of difficult for me to understand the topics that are taught and I didn't learn a lot over the course of online learning. I was also isolated from my friends and teachers." • "Teachers expected so much from us over distance learning and hardly ever allowed us to have a break to check on our own mental health. They expected us to teach ourselves some complicated lessons of math that we had no idea about. They expected us to understand the AP curriculum without explaining it. It was really a struggle for me. I need in person learning. I am very much a hands-on, in the classroom learner."			

a. Did it improve, worsen, or stay the same?	Improve	Worsen	Same
		II	IIII

Discussion

SL research has been predominantly geared towards improving outcomes for SL students in the past and has consistently shown the efficacy of SL on tutors/mentors. While the SL student's perspective has been widely explored within current literature, the CP student's perspective is not as well-researched and is an important consideration for improving the SL curriculum in mentorship. To address this gap in the literature, this mixed methods study interviewing high school CP students developed three major themes describing how SL may be improved and what mentees would gain from SL.

Theme 1: Perspective on the tutoring approach

The first theme was CP students feeling that "tutors/mentors should be supportive, patient, adaptable, trustworthy, and motivational." The responses provided by the students suggested that they wanted their tutors/mentors to understand their perspective and cater service to what makes the most sense for them. The literature suggests that an ideal mentor is someone who is supportive and is able to connect with the mentee, which is consistent with the first theme (Chan & Luo, 2020). SL allows for a bidirectional relationship in which the mentor and mentee view each other as equals, and they both make an active effort to understand each other's perspective, which has been concluded in past literature (Caspersz & Olaru, 2017). This theme emphasizes the importance mentees place on the mentor understanding the mentee's position and thus providing personalized support in whichever way would best serve the mentee. The qualities taught in the SL curriculum have the potential to specifically equip the mentors with this mindset so that they can best support the mentees as per Theme 1.

Theme 2: Perspective on academic benefits of SL

Theme 2 was that mentees felt that "SL helps improve academic achievement and confidence in school." CP students mentioned that participating in an SL relationship would facilitate their understanding of an academic subject and thus improve their academic achievement. Studies have shown that the incorporation of SL can lead to improved academic achievement for the mentors themselves; however, this theme explains that SL-driven mentorship may benefit the mentee's academics as well (Mackenzie et al., 2019). CP students also discussed during interviews that SL would help increase their confidence in school. This has important implications not only for their ability to attain high academic achievement but also for their self-efficacy as a student because levels of self-confidence were shown to be moderately correlated ($r=0.50$) with levels of self-efficacy among grade 12 students (Blanco et al., 2020). As such, SL can have at least an indirect positive effect on the CP students' self-efficacy. Overall, Theme 2 serves to support our hypothesis that SL can improve the academic achievement and self-efficacy of CP students.

Theme 3: Perspective on open communication of SL

Theme 3 was that mentees felt that "SL connects people from different backgrounds/experiences." On a broad scale, SL improves communication between the SL participants and CP, as noted by some CP students during interviews. An SL-focused study has shown that open communication and active listening are crucial parts of the mentor-mentee relationship and need to be focused on by both the mentor and mentee, which parallels theme 3 as

SL can lead to improvements in communication that are seen in mentors and mentees (Warshaw et al., 2020). Extending from this improvement in communication is an enhancement of intercultural sensitivity. SL as a concept stresses bi-directionality, and this is particularly of value for allowing the mentor and mentee to build their relationship in a way that fosters this intercultural sensitivity, eventually leading to mutual respect for one another's backgrounds and experiences (Chen et al., 2012). The CP students appeared to emphasize the importance of this particular benefit of SL since they felt that it is one main aspect that distinguishes SL-driven mentorship from traditional mentorship. As the world is rapidly evolving and becoming more globalized, respecting cultures from around the world is particularly important for students to learn as it will serve them for the rest of their life (Greene-Moton & Minkler, 2020). Although the specific aspect of SL serves as a platform for mentors and mentees to better connect with others with different backgrounds, there is still room for growth and improvement.

Suggestions

Particularly in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning, students faced an unprecedented amount of additional stress and pressure in their academic and personal lives (Hasanah et al., 2020). The administered questionnaire responses suggested that while educational delivery was transferred into a virtual modality, only a third of the participants had constant availability to a quiet, workable space in which they could study and take their classes from. Even though the pandemic limits interactions between students, SL students can still aid CP students in building a concrete and consistent study schedule that allows them to designate a time and place in which they can focus on their academics while confined to their homes (Lasater et al., 2021). Additionally, all but one of the students indicated that their academic performance remained the same or improved with the shift to online delivery. In order to enhance the experience for the maximum number of students, the SL curriculum needs to be better adapted to the different learning styles of each of the students. Being cognizant of the teaching style implemented will allow students to excel in their courses regardless of the mode of delivery used to educate the students. Moreover, in the explanations mentioned within the questionnaire and responses provided during the interviews, some of the students expressed issues of social isolation and Zoom fatigue/burnout. Here, adaptations in the SL curriculum could include adding an objective that involves improving interpersonal skills by increasing the amount of team-based activities or group work assignments (Hébert &Hauf, 2015).

Furthermore, it is the duty of those working as service personnel to utilize the resources allocated to us to serve our community. Student #5 voiced their perspective about how they feel that the service that was provided did not address the authentic needs of the community or the students in this situation. The lack of authenticity resonates with our study's purpose, which is to encourage consideration of the CP student's perspective to better the SL experience for both the SL students and the CP students. Given that this study is written from the perspective of pre-medical/medical students and that the study participants are from a medical career pathway, the focus on the community's perspective is especially salient in the healthcare field to ensure reciprocity and mutual benefit in patient-provider relationships (Parsi & Sovajassatakul, 2020).

Limitations

This study provides in-depth information regarding the beliefs of mentees on improving their experience with mentors through SL. This is a niche population with a limited sample size. Thus, the results of this study may not be generalizable to the great population of mentees. While

the feedback we received from the CP students provided valuable information that aided the understanding of their perspective of foreign SL students integrating into their community, it is important to note that four students indicated that they are not particularly familiar with any prior experiences related to SL. On the contrary, two students did report having had SL experiences preceding the study; however, those experiences were from the perspective of an SL-based program rather than that of a CP. At the start of the study, the term "Service-Learning" was defined for all participants with a conventional definition, which may have potentially influenced their perception of SL and, thus, their answers. In addition, the original plan for conducting a focus group session with the students was not completed due to spikes in COVID-19 cases in the area, and this can serve as a future study to build upon the findings from this study.

Conclusion

The findings from this study can serve as preliminary results from qualitative interviews and questionnaire responses from high school students to better elucidate mentees' perspectives on SL. Some limitations of this project include a small sample size of six students. The project was originally intended to recruit fifteen students; however, due to the peak waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, only six students were actually interviewed. Although the results of this study are not generalizable to the rest of the high school students in the nation, they provide unique insights based on the demographics of high school students in a specific region of California that can serve as a foundation for further research.

Other research that can be pursued as a result of this project includes adapting SL curricula to emphasize factors that the mentees found especially salient such as understanding their perspective, reflecting on cultural differences and learning more about them to improve intercultural sensitivity, and reflecting on differences in backgrounds/experiences. Interventions can be designed to test these topics in SL education and quantify the impact on both the mentees and mentors. Other interventions can evaluate CP student outcomes during the course of a tutoring/mentoring program by surveying them before and after the SL intervention based on the three measures of self-efficacy, academic achievement, and cognitive engagement.

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Appendix A

Theme	Interview Question	Community Partner (CP) Student # and Response
1) Tutors/mentors should be supportive, helpful, trustworthy, and motivating	What traits would you look for or appreciate in a tutor?	#1: "I want someone who is not afraid to push me to be better… enough to where I am stepping out of my comfort zone and learning something. I also want someone who isn't very strict in a sense to one method of teaching and they are open to new ideas and maybe new styles."
		#2: "I probably also look for how much do they really explain a problem so that it makes sense to me and how much do they really guide me on something … someone that is trustworthy."
		#6: "someone with a lot of patience because it takes me a really long time to understand things."
2) SL helps improve academic achievement, communication, and intercultural sensitivity	What do you think the effect of service learning would be on your academic performance? Confidence in school? Motivation in school?	#1: "I think it definitely benefits because it is very interactive because you are learning through teaching … it motivates both sides to put an effort in."
		#5: "In terms of academics, I think it would improve… and confidence-wise, I think it would bring a lot more confidence in me because I'd have that relationship, a two-way street with whoever's teaching it or with my mentor… I think it would motivate me to be more active and participate in school."
		#4: "I think Service Learning will help me know more about the subject area I am interested in and help me improve my grades.

		It will also help me become more social with people. I can meet more people and talk to them more."
	Based on how we have defined service learning, do you think it will have an effect on you achieving your goals? Can you elaborate?	#2: "I think it would help me reach my goals more because I think people would be more open to what I would have to say and could understand me … I think service learning characteristics are intertwined with my goals."
		#5: "I think so because it seems very cooperative, and a lot of careers in the future and in my own goals, it requires teamwork, it requires cooperating with other people. And I feel like this would build a better communication skill… and overall active listening."
3) SL connects people from different backgrounds/ experiences	What do you think the effect of service learning would be on your academic performance? Confidence in school? Motivation in school?	2: "I am learning about other cultures and other cultures are also learning about my cultures so it's like closer or I guess relatable I don't really know; I think our school is diverse already, I guess it would be more like you are more accepting and I can be more free with what I am saying? I think I would be more comfortable if the whole class was less tense and more … informal but still formal."
		#3: "This one time, I was tutoring a little girl from an elementary school that my little sister went to and she was having a hard time in history… I was giving her advice that I never really would have taken myself because I didn't really think of it before… And then it sat with me, and then I thought 'Oh, maybe I can apply that to when I need it.' It definitely helps you learn new lessons that you didn't think you would have needed… She was actually struggling with memorizing things. I was at the same time struggling with memorizing… I asked her, 'What do you enjoy doing that takes steps to do?' She said 'I like singing.' And then I said, 'Make it into a song.'… I had a science test the same week, and it was really hard to memorize what I had to be tested on… I enjoy dance; maybe that will help me with

		the way I present."