An Evaluation of the Mentoring to Overcome Struggles and Inspire Courage (MOSAIC) Program

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Dedication

Just your short existence offered me paths to undiscovered lands I never dreamt of visiting. When you said you can do more from “up there”, every cell in my body rejected that unimaginable theory. But if you weren’t up there, I wouldn’t be down here writing this paper, gettn’ this degree. And maybe this thought is the only thing that brings sense to a heart wrenching, senseless act. Everything I do with this piece of paper and this golden knowledge is in your honor, Jose. Everything.

Dedicated to my mentee & friend,

Jose Yovany “Psycho” Mendoza

10-31-95 to 11-22-13
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Abstract

An Evaluation of the Mentoring to Overcome Struggles and Inspire Courage (MOSAIC) Program

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Master of Social Work

This study examines the effectiveness of the California State University Northridge (CSUN) Mentoring to Overcome Struggles and Inspire Courage (MOSAIC) Program. MOSAIC is a mentorship program which serves youth at continuation high schools with the goal of increasing self-efficacy and goal attainment. This exploratory study examined pretest and posttest survey data collected from the college students enrolled in the 15 week MOSAIC course to assess if participation in the course resulted in an increase in knowledge and confidence about mentoring. Data analyses including descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted using the IBM software SPSS. Results show that of xx students enrolled in the course, xxx identified as “at risk youth (ARY).” The paired t-test analyses suggest that students in the MOSAIC course gained knowledge and confidence in their mentoring over the semester. Additional data shows that students who identified as ARY had higher knowledge, but not higher confidence at pretest than those who did not identify as ARY. Future studies should focus on the individual questions that represent knowledge and confidence to specifically identify the changes. This would provide a more precise picture of what specific areas need improvement as well as what parts of the curriculum are working effectively. This is the first examination of the
MOSAIC program. This research provided evidence of the effectiveness of the MOSAIC program on CSUN students which has a direct impact on the youth this program serves.
Introduction

While the prison industrial complex and their strong ties with America’s political agendas have negatively affected our current educational epidemic, the population that suffers the most is our youth. As the priority for funding continues to shift away from public education and towards the ever growing spending on prisons, a huge population emerges of vulnerable youth putting them on a track that follows suit (Youth Justice Coalition, 2012). Eventually, the responsibilities lie within the prior generations to assist with the guidance youth are starving for. As the leaders of our future, these individuals seek nurture, love, and support to reach their full potential. This predicament, coupled with the intersectionality of our youth, creates many opportunities for a preventable adverse experiences that can lead to a life of unnecessary struggles.

When confronted with obstacles, many youth lack positive role models, coping skills and the ability to make appropriate, healthy long-term decisions. The intersection of other identity markers can further complicate the picture for these youth (LGBTQ, foster youth, persons of color, undocumented, etc.). The decision making is best attributed to the stage in brain development that they are in and helps us to understand why “adolescence can be a time of increased risk for the onset of a wide range of emotional and behavioral problems, including depression, violent delinquency and substance abuse” (Steinber, 2005).

Outside of the traditional setting of high schools exist alternative schools like continuation high schools. Continuation high schools provide a more individualized educational environment that traditional high schools cannot provide. Smaller schools that have more one-on-one attention can be a better match for students who are struggling
and slipping through the institutional “cracks” (Barr & Parrett, 2001). These “cracks” can lead students through a destructive, but preventable path. The majority of theories agree that “negative experiences in school act as powerful forces that help to project juveniles into delinquency” (Cox, Allen, Hanser, & Conrad, 2013). Thornberry (1987) states that, “Dropping out of school was positively related to delinquency and later crime over both the long and short terms.” As a result, students are generally recommended by counselors and/or principals to enroll into an alternative school to take advantage of the flexible rules and hours (Ojeda, 2013, p. 10). “While there are many programs on mentoring at-risk youth, few programs focus specifically on continuation high schools” (Ojeda, 2013, p. 46). Research suggests alternative programs that meet the specific needs of students dealing with the effects of their negative environmental circumstances serves as a protective factor against academic failure and juvenile delinquency.

When speaking about the troublesome graduation rates for LAUSD, Gilbertson (2015) commented that the “farthest behind are the students in so-called "continuation" and "option" schools – programs designed for students at risk of dropping out or struggling with such challenges as teen pregnancies or medical issues. If no one intervenes, more than 80 percent of these sophomores won't be receiving a diploma” (para 9). This reflects a twenty percent graduation rate for students in continuation high school in the San Fernando Valley.

“For the at-risk high school student, it is obvious that most schools have compounded the problems of poverty, dysfunctional families, and low self-esteem with a decade-long barrage of humiliation, despair and defeat. It is no wonder why so many at-risk youth become pregnant during middle and high school; why so many turn to drugs
and alcohol; why so many carry guns to school and make violence, vandalism and school disruption an everyday occurrence; why so many violence-prone city youth see life as valueless and who so many at-risk kids wage daily war against teachers and the school. Most remarkable is the fact that so many of these students still come to school and continue to hang on to the diminishing dream of high school graduation (Barr & Parrett, 2001, p. 165).

High school graduation is often times a last chance at traditional “success” for many of our vulnerable youth. Mentorship is proof that many opportunities still remain for this population at their stage in development to change their attitudes about education and their dreams of graduating high school are still very attainable. According to Harvard Family Research Project, mentoring is defined as "someone who can patiently assist with someone's growth and development in a given area, this assistance can come in the form of guidance, teaching, imparting of wisdom and experience" (2011). Since the youth are at a greater risk of behaviors such as absenteeism, drug possession, substance use, gang affiliation, and violence, a strength based, non-punitive approach must be taken for a restorative change. Rather than pushing these youth further through the cracks, trained individuals must know how to work with and engage these youth.

Mentoring to Overcome Struggles and Inspire Courage, or MOSAIC, is a youth mentoring program based out of California State University Northridge (CSUN). MOSAIC emphasizes the importance of prevention, intervention, tutoring, mentoring, and counseling for the targeted population. This internship program trains and prepares upper-division, bachelor level university students how to mentor students at continuation high schools, both on an academic level and on a personal level. MOSAIC is based out
of CSUN’s Sociology Department and is a one-semester course offered to upper-division Sociology students who are seeking an internship required for graduation. MOSAIC works with 6 local continuation high schools in the San Fernando Valley, including Jack London High School, Jack London Community Day School, Evergreen Continuation High School, Will Rogers Continuation High School, Wooden Continuation High School, and Lewis Continuation High School. CSUN MOSAIC students complete 70 hours of internship per semester and provide mentoring services on site at the school there are assigned to.

Although there is lack of data that specifically has studied mentors in the continuation high school setting working with vulnerable youth, studies have gathered data about mentoring youth in general. Big Brothers/Big Sisters is one of the best-known volunteer mentoring programs in the United States, matching at-risk youth with adult mentors. Tierney & Grossman (1995) conducted one of the largest studies in the mentoring field, using a self report survey to identify and ask questions about several broad areas that mentoring might affect: antisocial activities, academic performance, attitudes and behaviors, relationships with family, relationships with friends, self-concept, and social and cultural enrichment. Based on their study of 959 youth who participated in the Big Brother/Big Sister program during 1992-1993 and were randomly assigned a control group or a experimental group, the researchers reported that mentees who were engaged in the mentoring program for one year were 46% less likely than the control group to start using illegal drugs, 27% less likely to start drinking, 52% less likely to skip a day of school, and 37% less likely to skip a class” (Keating, Tomishima, Foster & Alessandri, 2002). Additionally, the mentees were likely to be more trusting of their parents or
guardians and less likely to lie to them, as well as to feel more supported and less
criticized by their peers and friends” (Keating, Tomishima, Foster, & Alessandri, 2002).
Tierney and Grossman (1995) “concluded that high-intensity programs can work,
specifically those with more one-on-one contact.

Another study conducted in Washington State in 2007 on seven different programs
that provided mentorship reported interesting findings as well. Herrera, DuBois, and
Grossman (2013) found that the strongest benefit of mentoring programs, and most
consistent across risk groups, was a reduction in depressive symptoms. They found these
results to be particularly noteworthy given that depressive symptoms, such as high
worrisome levels, affected almost a reported one in four youth. Their findings also
suggested additional increases in overall social acceptance, academic attitudes and
grades. Bruce and Bridgeland (2014) offer findings on mentoring that are directly from
the perspectives of the youth. This first nationally representative survey reported that
mentoring “helped young people stay on or return to a successful path when they may
falter, and help them achieve key milestones on the path to adulthood, such as high
school graduation and college completion” among many findings.

These data suggest that mentoring is commonly known and accepted to be an
effective intervention for students who are at-risk of dropping out of school, and a variety
of other negative avenues. The MOSAIC mentoring program is unique in that it is
comprised of mentors specifically trained and supported to work in the continuation high
school setting with at-risk youth (ARY). Mentors are engaging the students while at
school in their own environment and around their peers. This allows for mentors to use
real time examples and experiences to serve as a role model and a guide for the youth.
Although, there is a lack of data that examines mentoring that occurs in the setting that MOSAIC is based in. In this study, the research examined if there was evidence of change in posttest scores of the students taking of the MOSAIC course related to knowledge about at-risk youth, confidence as a mentor, and participant self-perception and view of themselves as an at-risk youth.
Method

This study utilized an exploratory descriptive design. Data was collected from CSUN university students enrolled in the MOSAIC course for the Fall 2015 semester. A convenience sample was used and all students who attended the first and the final classes of the semester were invited to participate. Participation included collecting reflections of their experience in the class and measure knowledge and confidence over the course. The pretest was conducted on August 27, 2015 and the posttest was conducted on December 3, 2015. The survey was anonymous and voluntary. The incentive to take the survey was to assist MOSAIC in becoming a better program by providing feedback to specific questions. Students understood they could omit any questions they did not want to answer. The curriculum was delivered and designed by the MOSAIC Program Director.

This survey was used to collect the participants reflections of their experience in the class. Baseline measures of knowledge and confidence were identified, as well as changes in those measures by the end of the 16-week semester course.

Measures

A pre and posttest data collection protocol was implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of the MOSAIC program. The instrument used to collect data was a pretest and posttest survey that was created for evaluation of the MOSAIC course. Both surveys were exactly alike. Self-reported responses provided that data for this study.

Key variables include: general knowledge, confidence, and commonalities shared with at-risk youth. The pre and posttest survey consisted of fifteen questions; eight demographic questions (age, sex, ethnicity, religious perspective, class, degree, anticipated graduation date, and type of work experience), ten multiple choice Likert
scale questions (rate knowledge of ARY, effectiveness of mentorship for ARY, relatedness to ARY, confidence in mentoring skills, knowledge of overall realities of ARY, knowledge of the influence of youth’s culture on academic attitudes, knowledge of application of theory of self-efficacy, knowledge of effectiveness of praxis, knowledge of undocumented status impact on ARY and academic success, ability to document significant personal experiences), one yes or no question (did you consider yourself an ARY), and four open-ended questions (what is your definition of ARY, what are the social issues that impact ARY, how does the school-prison-pipeline affect ARY, list resources for ARY).

**Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using the IBM software SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were conducted to describe the sample. Paired t-tests were utilized to examine whether knowledge and confidence scores increased after taking MOSAIC, and the effect if the participant considered themself a former ARY.
Results

Demographics

The sample consisted of 31 MOSAIC students, 17 (54.8%) female and 14 (45.2%) male. The average age was 22 (71.3%). Participants were comprised of 23 (76.7%) Latinos, 2 (6.7%) Asian/Pacific Islander, 2 (6.7%) Caucasian, 1 (3.3%) African American, 1 (3.3%) Armenian, and 1 (3.3%) “other”. Of the participants, 13 (41.9%) were Catholic, 8 (25.8%) Christian, 10 (32.3%) marked “none” or declined to answer. Socioeconomic status varied among participants with 12 (38.7%) working class, 11 (35.5%) middle class, 3 (9.7%) lower class, 1 (3.2%) poverty class, and 4 (12.9%) declined to answer. Information on the participant’s educational path was collected where 22 (70.9%) of participants were majoring in sociology with a focus on criminology and 7 (22.5%) were general sociology majors, and 2 (6.4%) declined to answer. Academic class results show that 8 students (25.8%) were seniors graduating Fall 2015, 21 (67.7) were seniors graduating Spring 2016, 1 (3.2%) was a junior, and 1 (3.2%) declined to answer. The majority of participants, 25 (80.6%), had past customer service work experience, 2 (6.5%) had clerical experience, 3 (9.7%) marked “other”, and 1 (3.2%) declined to report.

Pre and Posttest Examination of the Change in Knowledge and Confidence

Knowledge was determined by the student responses to the following questions: 1) How would you rate your knowledge regarding ARY, 2) How would you rate your knowledge regarding attitudes, values, and overall understanding of ARY and the realities facing them, 3) How would you rate your knowledge towards the application of the theory of self-efficacy, and 4) How would you rate your knowledge towards the effectiveness of praxis. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate overall impact.
of the curriculum on student knowledge about ARY. There was a statistically significant increase in knowledge from Pretest (M=10.48, SD=2.55) to Posttest (M=17.29, SD=2.05), t(-11.34), p=<0.000 (2-tailed). These results suggest that students in the MOSAIC course gained knowledge.

Confidence was determined by the responses given to the following questions: 1) How would you rate your confidence in your mentorship skills, and, 2) How would you rate your writing abilities to document significant personal experiences. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate overall impact of the curriculum on student confidence about mentoring. There was a statistically significant increase in confidence from Pretest (M=7.06, SD=1.34) to Posttest (M=8.67, SD=1.01), t(-7.00) p=<0.000 (2-tailed). These results suggest that students in the MOSAIC course gained confidence.

Participants were asked if they considered themselves an ARY while growing up. An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if knowledge or confidence levels at Pretest differed for those participants who identified as a former ARY. Results of the independent sample t-test and descriptive statistics shows that mean student’s Pretest knowledge differs between ARY identified (M = 11.64, SD = 2.62, n = 14) and non ARY identified (M = 9.53, SD = 2.12, n = 17) at the .05 level of significance (t = 2.48, df = 29, p < .05, 95% CI for mean difference 0.37 to 3.85). These results state that on average, students who identified as ARY had higher knowledge during the Pretest than those who did not identify as ARY. Results of the independent sample t-test and descriptive statistics shows that mean student’s Pretest confidence is not significantly different between ARY identified (M = 7.57, SD = 1.39, n = 14) and non ARY identified (M = 6.65, SD = 1.17, n = 17) at the .05 level of significance (t = 2.00, df = 29, p < .05, 95%
CI for mean difference -0.01 to 1.86). These results state that on average, students who identified as ARY did not have a statistically significant difference of confidence during Pretest than those who did not identify as ARY.
**Discussion**

This study serves as a springboard for future analysis of data obtained by students. The willingness of the MOSAIC program to conduct a program evaluation on themselves to examine their effectiveness is an admirable strength. It is unique that a program invests in collecting and analyzing data to use to inform them of their work. Although previous changes have been made to the curriculum and delivery of the material, changes were based on anecdotal responses from students, and not based on a more systematic research approach. This study allows for student’s voices to be heard and curriculum changes to be guided by them.

It appears that participants in the study had an increase in knowledge and in confidence after taking the MOSAIC class. Regardless of the higher rated knowledge from participants who identified as ARY before taking MOSAIC, knowledge was increased for both groups. This is important because it shows that the curriculum and the delivery of the curriculum are effective for individuals who identified as ARY or not. Data on confidence shows that it was not affected by ARY identification before the MOSAIC class. This means that the majority of the class started with a level of confidence that was not affected by their experience as an ARY or not.

This study leaves room for much further analysis and data collection. Analyzing all of the pre and posttest results to identify general feedback on all questions would be the first recommendation. The gathered data will provide a general overview of what is and is not effectively being addressed. Additionally, due to the lumped categories found in “knowledge” and “confidence” as used in this study, future research could focus on the individual questions that represent knowledge and confidence to specifically identify the
changes. This would provide a more precise picture of what specific areas need improvement as well as what parts of the curriculum are working effectively. Also, providing specific definitions of what ARY are, then asking questions based on that provided definition will strengthen the fidelity of the responses.

The MOSAIC course is responsible for providing CSUN students with the training needed to mentor ARY in settings that have graduation rates generally at 20%. The curriculum, delivery and application of this information are essential for creating mentoring successes for these students. With the information provided by this study, the MOSAIC program can have evidence that there is growth in the CSUN students which directly effects their ability to mentor the youth. This means that the youth are receiving mentoring that is aligned to MOSAIC’s standards. Providing ARY with resources that directly impact their ability to be successful and build their self-efficacy is a social justice victory.

Moving forward, while the term “at-risk youth” has been used in the survey questions and in the paper, there is an evolution in MOSAIC occurring that is focused on shifting to a strength-based lens to labeling. “Resilient youth”, “at-hope youth”, and “opportunity youth” are possible terms that are being considered.
Conclusion

This is the first examination of the MOSAIC program. This research provided evidence of the effectiveness of the MOSAIC program on CSUN students which is a direct impact on the youth this program serves. Youth who do not fit within the traditional school model are often at a higher risk of not graduating high school. This is often due to a variety of social justice-related issues such as power, privilege, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Programs such as MOSAIC provide an intervention that offers a humanistic approach to reconnect students to their education and overall goals. The vision of the MOSAIC program is to ensure that all youth have access to a mentor and a positive role model who can help clear the path to their dreams and goals. Future expansion and funding plans will use data collected in this study and future studies.
References


experiences and outcomes for youth with varying risk profiles. Retrieved from:


Appendix A. MOSAIC Survey Questionnaire

CSUN MOSAIC QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey is voluntary. Your responses are anonymous and will be used to improve the MOSAIC program. Thank you for participating! You’re helping make MOSAIC a better program!

-The MOSAIC Research Team

- Age: ____________
- Sex: ____________
- Race: ______________
- Religious Perspective: ______________
- Class: ______________
- Degree: ______________
- Anticipated Graduation Date: _____________
- Type of work experience:

____________________________________________________________________________________

1. How would you rate your knowledge regarding at-risk youth?
   excellent very good good poor none

2. How effective is mentorship as an intervention for at risk youth?
   very effective effective somewhat effective not effective not sure

3. How much do you relate to at-risk youth?
   excellent very good good poor none

4. How would you rate your confidence in your mentorship skills?
   excellent very good good poor none

5. How would you rate your knowledge regarding attitudes, values and overall understanding of at-risk youth and the realities facing them?
   excellent very good good poor none

6. How does youth culture affect youths’ attitudes toward academics?
   always somewhat not much never not sure

7. How would you rate your knowledge towards the application of the theory of self-efficacy?
   excellent very good good poor none

8. How would you rate your knowledge towards the effectiveness of praxis?
   excellent very good good poor none
9. How much does undocumented status affect academic success?
always somewhat not much never not sure

10. How would you rate your writing abilities to document significant personal experiences?
excellent very good good poor none

11. When you were growing up, would you have considered yourself an at risk youth?
Yes or No

12. What do you think an at-risk youth is?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

13. What different social issues impact at risk youth?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

14. Are you familiar with the “school to prison pipeline”? If so, how would you define it and how does it affect at-risk youth?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

15. List resources that you are aware of for the at-risk youth population.
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________