Preparing Students for Applied Learning: Assessment of Mentor Training
Background

- Applied learning has become an important part of education for social work majors over the last 20 years.

- In 2014 almost 80% of social work programs identified they begin with applied learning in the early part of the program (Schelbe, Petracchi & Weaver, 2014).

- ONU, as well as many other programs, require an applied learning block in SOWK 200 Introduction to Social Work.

- Little empirical research about service-learning in social work education (Schelbe, Petracchi & Weaver, 2014).
Benefits of Early Applied Learning Opportunities

• Assists students in deciding if Social Work is where they desire to study and practice
• Promotes reflection
• Builds skills, knowledge and values
• Increases awareness of social justice
• Increases cultural awareness and understanding diversity
Challenges of Early Applied Learning Opportunities

• Challenges on the field can deter students from wanting to go into social work
• Limited supervision/accountability
• Limited training/preparation of students
• Time available/transportation
Rationale for Current Study

• Students in SOWK 200 Introduction to Social Work have been completing their first Applied Learning block in Kennedy Middle Grade School for several years.

• Last semester, with new administrators at the school, they felt the SW students were not benefiting the students

• Because the main reason was related to the students not being prepared, the process began to train the students as mentors (same training offered to community mentors)
This semester a 2-hour mentor training was provided by Deb Tamaz, MSW in the first week of classes.

Students were assigned to one of two schools: King Middle Grade (Kankakee) and Liberty Intermediate School (Bourbonnais).

At Liberty students were paired with mentees.

At King students were paired with a teacher.
Study

- A satisfaction survey was developed for both students and teachers/administrators
- IRB approval gained
- Surveys were distributed to students, teachers/administrators from last semester
- Preliminary surveys were given to students from this semester
- Qualitative data was collected in class discussion for previous students (and will be collected this semester)
Results - Students

- **Pre-Mentor Training (n=9)**

- **Post-Mentor Training (n=14)**
Results - Students

• **PRE-TRAINING**
  • I wish we had been given examples and scenarios of what to expect
  • Teachers didn’t always seem they wanted us there
  • I didn’t feel like I had any preparation for mentoring students
  • I didn’t know what to say to the students in the beginning
  • Felt like I was thrown into the experience

• **POST-TRAINING**
  • I learned more than I ever could in a classroom about issues faced by children
  • It has been wonderful.
  • I’ve learned so much
  • This should only be for social work majors.
  • Experience was less than expected
  • Communication with school is a challenge
Results - Teachers

- Pre-Mentor Training (n=3)
- Post-Mentor Training (n=14)
Results-Teachers

- **PRE-TRAINING**
  - Mentors were great but it became a distraction for the classroom.
  - Mentors were great, but the program needs more structure and the mentors need more training.
  - Mentors had great attitudes but they lacked training: responding to abuse/neglect disclosures, when to involve staff, etc.
  - Would be better to pair mentor/mentee

- **POST-TRAINING**
  - Students loved having their mentor come meet with them.
  - More communication between the mentor and teacher would be helpful
Recommendations

- Train students as mentors as this semester but add case scenarios for how to respond to different issues mentees might be facing.

- Pair mentors with 4-5 mentees in different schools so students can develop relationships and work more intentionally with mentee (similar to community mentoring program).

- Develop a form to fill out after each mentor session to help communicate with teacher and help mentor be more intentional.