

Engaging Students in Constructive Youth-Adult Relationships: A Case Study of Urban School-based Agriculture Students and Positive Adult Mentors

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The purpose of this bounded single case study was to explore the day-to-day functioning of a successful urban school-based agriculture veterinary program. Findings indicated student success was a product of multiple youth-adult relationships created through communal environments. Adults served as mentors with whom students felt constant, caring support. The bonds formed between students and adults were a result of the program and/or internship atmosphere. This case demonstrated how a school-based agricultural veterinary program can serve the educational needs of students in urban areas. The potential learning outcomes include developing students' understanding of agriculture content knowledge, professional skills attainment, and life skill development necessary for healthy, productive lives beyond formal schooling. The researchers recommend agriculture teachers develop opportunities for students to cultivate meaningful relationships with adult role models beyond the classroom. Agriculture teachers should adopt teaching and communication strategies to encourage open, trusting, and safe learning environments to enhance student engagement.

Keywords: agricultural education; urban education; youth-adult relationship; mentors

School-based agricultural education does not fully serve the needs of urban, suburban, and other diverse student populations. Most school-based agriculture programs are located in rural areas, creating a major barrier to reaching diverse student populations (Jones & Bowen, 1998; Talbert & Edwin, 2008; Talbert & Larke, 1995; Warren & Alston, 2007). Other barriers exist for quality agriculture programs in urban and suburban areas, including level of agricultural content knowledge of urban students (Pense & Leising, 2004; Trexler, 2000), issues facing urban agriculture teachers (Warner & Washburn, 2009), factors of urban students' career choice (Esters & Bowen, 2004), and factors influencing enrollment in agriculture programs (Esters & Bowen, 2005; Hoover & Scanlon, 1991). While the existing barriers have been documented, research is needed regarding effective models for urban agricultural education

programs. Soloninka (2003) examined an urban agriculture program as a model of innovation is small animal care and described unique findings about the roles of adults in the program. The research recommended further examination of adult roles in urban agriculture programs. An understanding of youth-adult relationships within urban settings may provide direction for agricultural educators to better serve the needs of diverse student populations.

Adults, including parental and non-familial adults, play a large role in shaping and directing the development of youth into healthy, productive future citizens (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Halpern, 2005). Parental relationships are crucial for healthy human development from early childhood through the end of adolescence (Hartup, 1989). In an effort to find their identity during early and middle adolescence, youth increasingly distance themselves from parental adults and explore

relationships beyond the home setting (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). Youth benefit in multiple ways from exploring the adult world, particularly when they are given the opportunity to interact and learn from positive, non-familial adult figures. Adolescent-aged youth who form meaningful positive relationships with non-familial adults report improved academic success, including increased knowledge gain, enhanced transfer of learned content to other applications, and display better attitudes towards adults (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). Positive non-familial adult figures can provide critical developmental opportunities for adolescent-aged youth.

Teachers have the potential to serve as positive non-familial adult figures and form constructive relationships with students (Bergin & Bergin, 2012). Teacher-student relationships can positively influence student cognitive outcomes, including increased levels of critical thinking, use of higher order thinking skills, and meta-cognitive skills (Cornelius-White, 2007). Similarly, positive teacher-student relationships can influence student behavioral outcomes, increasing student participation during class time, student satisfaction with content, and enhancing motivation to learn (Cornelius-White, 2007). Positive teacher-student relationships can also reduce the problem behaviors of school dropout, aggression, disruptive actions in class, and school absences (Bergin & Bergin, 2012; Cornelius-White, 2007). Teachers of diverse student populations also need to practice multicultural education to ensure educational equality. Researchers have characterized multicultural education as student-centered curriculum that builds cultural awareness and empowers students. Teachers need to adopt a culturally-relevant pedagogy and foster caring relationships with students to maximize diverse students' potential (Banks, 2004; Landson-Billings, 1994). Student outcomes can be greatly enhanced if teachers are willing to foster meaningful teacher-student relationships (Bergin & Bergin, 2012; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Frymier & Houser, 2000).

The current structure of school-based agriculture programs provides teachers with unique opportunities to enhance student-teacher

relationships through extended contact time in the classroom, FFA, and supervised agricultural experience programs (SAEs). Many students receive instruction from the same agriculture teacher across multiple classes for multiple years, thus creating a sustained relationship with that teacher. SAEs provide additional outlets for adults to facilitate positive youth-adult relationships, with and beyond the agriculture teacher, which may not have existed otherwise, particularly in diverse, urban communities (Jones & Schneider, 2009). SAEs include individual student experiences in agricultural related careers where students participate in real-world a work environment, which often includes youth-adult interaction. Furthermore, SAEs can facilitate youth-adult interaction over an extended period of time, as SAEs are designed to grow with the student throughout high school (Phipps, Osborn, Dyer, & Ball, 2008). Active student involvement in agriculture programs can foster multiple opportunities for students to cultivate beneficial youth-adult relationships.

The mission of agricultural education calls for the inclusion of more diverse populations; the most fertile areas for growth in agricultural education are in urban and suburban areas (National Research Council, 2009). There is a critical need to develop models for quality urban and suburban agricultural education programs that meet community needs (National Council of Agriculture, 2000). Traditional models of school-based agriculture programs do not always serve the unique needs of students and communities in urban and suburban areas. When compared to more traditional rural programs, urban schools have structural differences that influence the nature of how a typical school-based agriculture program is shaped (Esters & Bowen, 2004, 2005). Understanding these differences can potentially benefit stakeholders, teachers, and teacher educators as school-based agriculture programs expand into new areas. Thus, the driving question for the current study was: how are urban programs linking agriculture students with adults, and what meaning do students and adults assign to their experiences? The current case study presents a multi-faceted view of a successful urban veterinary agriculture programs' youth-adult relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The initial purpose of this bounded single case study was to explore the day-to-day functioning of a successful urban school-based agriculture veterinary program known by the researchers. The researchers began the data collection process with the intention of refining the purpose to reflect the emerging issues of the case. The following central question emerged as an emic issue after initial data collection, and guided the remainder of this study: What was the meaning of the youth-adult relationships developed in this program? The research aligns with guidelines set forth by the National Research Agenda, specifically addressing the Research Priority Area 5: Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs focusing the inquiry to, "Define the characteristics of effective agricultural education programs and teachers and the means to correctly assess the current state of these characteristics" (Doerfert, 2011, p.10).

Description of the Program

The bounded single case study examined an urban high school agricultural veterinary program located in a large city with a population of over two million residents. Researchers purposefully selected this urban high school veterinary program because of its unique location, program design, student demographics, and the large number of program completers entering careers or higher education related to the animal science or the veterinary industry. The program was located in an inner city technical school of 1200 students. The four-story brick school building, built in the early 1960s, was located in an industrial area near the downtown of a major metropolitan area. Unlike traditional rural programs in comprehensive high schools, each student applied for admission in the program and met specific academic requirements to maintain enrollment.

The veterinary classroom was located in the basement of the school and included a classroom, an animal lab, kennels, a wash space, and a storage area. One young, white female teacher originally from a rural area in a

neighboring state managed the program. This Junior/Senior program had a total enrollment of 33 students, consisting of 25 females and 8 males, with 21 African Americans, 11 Caucasian, and 1 Asian student. Twenty-eight students qualified for free/reduced lunch (85%). Students were required to complete an application to be considered for enrollment in the veterinary program during their junior and senior years. While agriculture curricula tracks in traditional rural programs can last up to four years, this program was designed and implemented as an intense, two-year program. Students were required to complete an introductory Small Animal Care course during their first year; senior students were required to take an Advanced Animal Care course. All seniors completed a one-semester internship experience in local neighborhood animal shelters, veterinarian clinics, animal care facilities, or public aquariums/parks. During the internship, students were assigned to work with an assigned supervisor at a designated site two days per week as the capstone experience of the veterinary program. Seniors were required to interview for internships prior to placement with their internship supervisor. The agriculture teacher recruited and monitored all internship sites and supervisors. Student internship experiences were designed to familiarize students to real world work environments, to incorporate skills learned in the veterinary program, and to learn from adult internship supervisors.

Case Study Methodology

The rationale for the single case methodology was the intrinsic nature of urban agricultural veterinary program (Stake, 1995). An intrinsic case merits investigation because the program was a case unique in geography, curriculum, and student population. The researchers operated under a constructivist epistemology which emphasized openness in data coding and a commitment to preserving multiple realities, including contradictory viewpoints. The participants' responses, rather than a predetermined theoretical framework, shaped the data collection process (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). All researchers were former agriculture teachers with traditional

agricultural backgrounds; none had ever experienced living or teaching in a metropolitan community or veterinary program. Three researchers possessed minimal teaching experience concerning ethnically diverse student populations; one researcher previously taught in an ethnically diverse school-based agricultural education program.

Researchers interviewed twelve students, three school administrators, and two internship supervisors. The agriculture teacher was interviewed on four separate occasions as well. The researchers selected participants based on their familiarity with the veterinary program and availability for participation. The adult interviews lasted in duration from 10 to 45 minutes each, while student interviews ranged from 10 to 40 minutes in length. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Researchers attended an advisory council meeting, which was audio recorded and transcribed. The advisory council meeting was two hours long with seven individuals in attendance. Researchers conducted over 20 hours of fieldwork, including three instances of classroom instruction and eleven internship site visits with the teacher, supervisors, and students. All observations were recorded as field notes and transcribed as logs. Nine program documents, including internship placement packet, learning and behavioral expectations, assessment procedures, and personal plans of study, were also analyzed. Documents were analyzed using similar methods as the field notes, with special emphasis on the intention and intended audience for each document. All transcripts, logs, and documents were collapsed into a single 6000-line document for analysis. The multitude of data provided a multi-faceted view of the program and facilitated triangulation of data (Stake, 1995).

Investigators began with a general research question of “what factors made this urban agricultural veterinary program successful?” The openness of the initial research question allowed for participants to reveal the issues of the case, or emic issues. After initial open data coding, the researchers refined the research question to reflect these emic issues (Stake, 1995). The refinement of the central research question followed Stake’s methodology

of progressive focusing. This issue, or refined research question, which guided further data collection was, “What was the meaning of the youth-adult relationships developed in this program?” Topical questions which emerged included exploring the perspectives and experiences of teacher, students, internship supervisors, and school administration regarding youth-adult relationships. The findings of the study were written as thick, rich descriptions, presented as vignettes, to provide vicarious experiences for the reader. The researchers included a concluding paragraph with each vignette to further explore themes represented in the vignette. To maintain confidentiality, the researchers represented the school, students, adults, and businesses using pseudonyms.

Credibility of the findings was established through triangulation at multiple levels. Initially, researchers developed data source triangulation by validating participants’ interview statements with their behaviors during field observations. Methodological triangulation occurred by building confirmation of the themes through the interviews, observations, and documents of the case. Investigator triangulation was established by having multiple researchers reach a consensus on the emergent themes (Stake, 1995). Researchers individually read and coded all transcripts, then collectively created a matrix of emergent themes and sub-themes. The researchers conducted regular peer debriefs and member checks with participants as the themes emerged to establish credibility (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Transferability (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002), was built by the researchers utilizing thick, rich descriptions of the case vignettes. Dependability and confirmability (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002) were facilitated through triangulation, comparing the emerging codes of each researcher, conducting peer reviewing, and maintaining an audit trail.

Findings

The researchers utilized vignettes to help explain the emerging themes. The vignettes represented the following themes:

1. Students were engaged in multiple youth-adult relationships, both within and outside the school.
2. A learning community was developed, which created an atmosphere of trust and safety among students and adults.
3. The program generated new opportunities for students while developing their self-worth.

The vignettes are based on field observations and interviews woven into a narrative. The vignettes represent the participants' actual quotes and observed actions.

The Lunchtime Refuge

As the lunch bell rings, Ms. Anderson, the agriculture teacher, sits down at her cluttered desk to check her emails and text messages. Ms. Anderson picks at her re-heated lunch as she stares back and forth between the computer screen and her cell phone. Sunny and Comet, two visiting dogs, sit underneath the desk pawing and whimpering for attention. She admits to sending texts to some students 6-7 times each day. "Annie, don't forget your biology test tomorrow." "Ryan, I missed you yesterday when I visited your internship site. Why didn't you show up?" "Javon, we are going to Eisenhower High tomorrow for a recruiting trip, make sure you get your permission slip signed." Ms. Anderson texts two more students before she moves on to the unopened emails in her inbox. Sunny leaves her desk and heads for the classroom door, sitting and barking. Moments later, someone knocks at the door. Ms. Anderson follows Sunny and opens the door. Two students, both dressed identically in their school uniforms, enter with their lunch. "Can we eat with you today?" Ms. Anderson moves the animal gate from in front of the door and welcomes the students into the laboratory. One student makes his way to a

computer in the back of the laboratory and eats his lunch quietly. The other student goes into the kennel room to play with a box of kittens.

Ms. Anderson returns to her food and messaging at her desk. Four more students appear at her door and ask to spend their lunch in Ms. Anderson's room. The students congregate in the classroom, and the space becomes noticeably louder. As Ms. Anderson finishes her lunch, she turns to me and says:

For their lunch shift, they'll grab something to eat and come down here and just spend 20 minutes hanging out and away from the drama of the school. And sometimes they want to talk, and sometimes they just need a few minutes of chill time away from everything else. And even faculty, sometimes they'll come down when they're stressed out and kids are driving them crazy.

Ms. Anderson uses her teaching position to intentionally create a consistent, positive presence for students. I walk across the room to the student sitting at the computer, carefully avoiding the gerbil in the plastic ball rolling around at my feet. I strike up a conversation with the girl who tells me about her experience with Ms. Anderson.

I had a really bad skipping school problem last year. Really, really, bad. And she would make an effort to text me and say, "Dana, you better be at school today. Dana, your grade is slipping. Dana, you really need to come [to school]"

I am a distraction to Dana's task at hand, so I return to Ms. Anderson's desk. I can't help but ask the teacher if the room is always like this at lunch. Ms. Anderson says, "They tend to think of the room as their closet in the morning...they bring their backpack to class and leave it there saying that they will be back to eat lunch. It is fine because... it is me filling that role."

Exploring 'the lunchtime refuge' vignette

Theme one was manifested in the vignette through Ms. Anderson's constant interaction with students. Ms. Anderson regularly sent text messages to students attempting to provide a stable source of guidance. Dana, and other

students, testified to the influence of Ms. Anderson's vigilance. Theme two emerged as the students, the teacher, and even faculty in the school viewed the agriculture classroom as a safe place. Students used the agriculture classroom as a place to escape the "drama" that often occurred throughout the school. They viewed the agriculture classroom as "their space," which they accessed for reasons beyond instruction.

The Most Unlikely Agriculture Mentor

I step out of Ms. Anderson's car, carefully avoiding the passing downtown city traffic. We walk between towering skyscrapers on either side of the street among numerous small retail stores tucked among the giant structures. We hear engines of cars, drivers honking at other cars; more than anything else, I hear the buzz that is a living, breathing metropolis. Our destination was Downtown Pet Store, a student internship site. As we enter the store, a neatly dressed African-American male is talking on the telephone behind the counter. He waves us in, and I decide to take a self-guided tour of the store as Ms. Anderson waits to speak to him. I am impressed with the gleaming hardwood floors, neatly organized shelves, and obvious efficiency in which the gentleman uses such a small space. The phone conversation ends, so I walk to the front counter to listen to his discussion with Ms. Anderson.

The man behind the counter, Mr. Durant, is the owner of the store. Mr. Durant's intern is also an African-American male; this intern has faced multiple challenges at home and in his personal life. Mr. Durant is worried about the intern falling into the wrong crowd. He tells a story to Ms. Anderson describing his philosophy on preparing interns for success after school:

I'm not going to go out there and do it for you. What I do is I'm going to try to give you the tools to build a house. I'll build the foundation, but I'm not going to build the house. I'll build the foundation, and I'll give you the tools. But you have to build the house because then, when it's finished, you'll appreciate it and you'll never forget it.

Mr. Durant stresses the importance of encouraging the students to think through situations in work or life. For instance, the intern did not know the fastest bus route to Downtown Pet Store and was routinely late to work. Mr. Durant explained to him that you should always ask for help and urged him to contact the bus station for their expertise on routes. Mr. Durant refers to what he told the student earlier in the semester, "If you don't know, then you call the 800 number and ask. They [the bus drivers] aren't going to call you and say 'Where do you want to go today?' It's up to you to find out and put the pieces together." Mr. Durant also helped set up a checking account for the student to teach him money management skills. For Mr. Durant, the internship is much more than learning about animals, this internship is about helping students in need of a positive adult mentor:

You're supervising and helping someone, a young person that needs it. You don't have time for half the stuff you do, but you have to make time for that. You're helping them, and that helps everybody when you help the young people. Especially the ones having problems with their family, or their grades, or their self-esteem. Most of the time it's their self-esteem that's been broken down by whatever. You have to build it back up so that they know they're a good person.

As we leave Downtown Pet Store I ask Ms. Anderson if Mr. Durant was unusual in the level of concern he had for the well being of the intern. Ms. Anderson replied, "I think it is mostly the norm."

Exploring the 'most unlikely of agriculture mentor' vignette.

Theme one emerged as Mr. Durant was engaged with his intern at a personal level; he served as a role model for his intern in multiple contexts, both personally and professionally. Mr. Durant intentionally carried himself and his business with a high level of professionalism, in part because he recognized many of his interns lived in chaotic environments. Mr. Durant modeled skills related to planning and

navigating personal situations his intern might later face in the real world, which emerged as theme three. As a role model, Mr. Durant fostered independence and accountability in his interns, leading to feelings of competence and self-efficacy for students, which was part of theme three. Mr. Durant taught his students life skills, including personal financial management and navigating public transportation. The mentor carefully crafted the experience in a manner where the intern gained the personal tools needed for future life success.

Feeling Like Family

Our next stop was to visit Stan at the Riverside Veterinary Clinic. We are in an older business neighborhood, but the brick clinic building shines with its white sign and bright teal awnings. Ms. Anderson tells me this clinic is where she brings classroom animals when they need to see a vet. As we walk in the door, we meet two women with large dogs waiting to see the vet and two other customers are paying a receptionist. Stan, a young African-American male with thick-framed black glasses, yells across the clinic, "Hi Ms. Anderson!" Stan leads us through the door into the back of the clinic. We walk into a large, open room where four veterinarians work feverishly on a variety of animals. Behind me, a small white dog is under anesthesia and is getting its teeth cleaned by a middle-aged Caucasian woman. I am almost run over by a veterinary technician as she carries an unconscious dog back to its kennel from surgery. Ms. Anderson asks Stan how the internship is going. Stan says:

I was actually invited to Molly's [Riverside Clinic employee] retirement party at Dr. Clark's house. He gave me directions and everything. I actually had to go on Facebook after I left [the party] to make a status update just to say how loved I felt because I haven't even known these people for a year. I think I've known them for 4 or 5 months, and already they've taken me in, and shown me so many different things, and it was just a total honor for me... He [Dr. Clark] told me to give him my contact information, my cell phone, email

address, and anytime I needed a reference for anything, to call him or email him.

Stan continues his updates as the hustle and bustle in the room escalates further. Ms. Anderson's cell phone rings; she steps out of the room and into the reception area to escape the many noises echoing around the room. I ask Stan about Ms. Anderson. He replies:

Last year, she was like, my teacher. Last year she was actually my favorite teacher, and that was pretty much it. She was Ms. A, just the cool Ag Ed/Pre-Vet teacher. This year... I don't know if it's me or her, but she's kind of taken on a new role, but she's actually been like my family. She's helped me a lot. My mom moved to [city] for different opportunities and she's doing very well down there, but she's not here, so whenever I need someone like face-to-face or whenever I just want to sit or come down she's [Ms. Anderson] always here. She just does so much...

I then ask Stan his opinion of his internship experience. He replies:

This program just opens up a whole new world that a lot of other students don't have... We can say, 'Hey, I have this training so I'm going to go fill out this application for an animal assistant.' There's just so many things that this program enables us to do.

As we are leaving Riverside, I ask Ms. Anderson what Stan will do after high school. She tells me he plans on going to [State University] to become a wildlife veterinarian.

Exploring the 'feeling like family' vignette.

Theme three was evident in this vignette because Stan gained multiple resources for his future. Dr. Clark was willing to be a reference for Stan; the veterinarian went one step farther by intentionally including Stan into the clinic's social network. Stan's comments also supported theme two, the atmosphere of the agriculture program, as he described Ms. Anderson and the internship supervisor. Ms. Anderson fulfilled Stan's need for a temporary motherly figure in addition to her teaching role. The office

retirement party also offered Stan unexpected feelings of belonging and openness with his coworkers.

Career Mentoring in Action

We enter into the small, well lit grooming room of Church Street Veterinary Clinic. This morning, Ms. Scott [intern supervisor] is grooming a small Pomeranian on the grooming table in the front half of the room. Behind her is an African American female student grooming a Poodle on a separate table. The room is small; we are squeezed between the storage cabinets on the left side of the room and kennels on the right with dogs of various sizes and colors waiting for their turn with the groomers. Ms. Anderson and Ms. Scott speak with soft voices as to not disturb the busy students or to startle the animals. I can't help but notice that as Ms. Scott talks, she does not stop the motions of her hands; she is constantly brushing the dog's coat with her left hand. With her right, she is insistently readjusting the dog's position on the table. Throughout the conversation, she never stops these motions; her motions seem natural and effortless. Ms. Anderson engages in small talk about the student interns and then asks, "Are you gonna be sad to see them go?" Ms. Scott's voice drops to a whisper, "We are making them both a scrapbook and giving it to them on their last day." The two begin to reminisce about the internships.

I walk to the back half of the room where Rachel is working. Rachel struggles keeping the Poodle relaxed while brushing out the knots on her back left leg. She is attempting to mimic the natural hand motions of Ms. Scott. Ms. Scott occasionally whispers a quick hint to Rachel about how to better hold the Poodle. Casually, I initiate a conversation with Rachel and ask her about the internship. She looks up from the Poodle and says:

... A really good experience, like a big family. They don't hide anything. Ms. Scott is really open about how they get the work done, the way that they're paid and what you should expect working in a job like this. It just gave us a lot of basic experience. Just getting to meet

different types of people I may not have met otherwise.

Just then, another African American female student walked into the room through a side door carrying a small dog in her arms. I am somewhat startled when Clarice enters, because I was not aware of the separate grooming room. Apparently, Clarice is trusted to work on her own in the adjoining room. Clarice puts the dog back in a crate and then retrieves a Cocker Spaniel from the row of kennels on the right side of the room. Clarice says hello to Ms. Anderson and walks back into the other grooming room after she has received instructions from Ms. Scott.

I think I am in the way of Rachel's work, so I move back to my original position in the room next to Ms. Anderson and Ms. Scott. The two women have not stopped talking and Ms. Scott has continued working with the Pomeranian. I listen in to what Ms. Scott is saying:

One of the interns actually has a part-time job for the summer helping us out in grooming as a bather. The reason she got that job was that she had the confidence to bring it up with Dr. Benson. We've never hired a summer bather before, in all the years I've been here. It's a fantastic help to us, and because this young woman [Clarice] had the confidence to even approach Dr. Benson and tell him that she would love it if she could have a part-time job here and if there was a possibility, he thought about it. He talked to me, and I said "Heck yes." It wouldn't have occurred to me to ask, so she took it upon herself. That says a lot that she knows she has a skill to offer, and maybe she'll get hired. And the other girl [Rachel] we had had the confidence to apply to another grooming facility in downtown [city]. So I don't think they would've had that kind of confidence before this internship program.

Ms. Anderson looks at her cell phone and says we need to head to the next internship site. We say our goodbyes and depart Church Street Veterinary Clinic.

Exploring the ‘career mentoring in action’ vignette

Ms. Scott typified theme one as a caring role model who provided students with a meaningful relationship through her constructive feedback and caring attitude. For instance, she took her own personal time in making a scrapbook for each student. The students also worked in an environment they viewed as a “family,” which further illustrated theme two. Ms. Scott entrusted the girls to groom the dogs as she would with her full time employees. Students felt so comfortable that one actually worked up the courage to ask for summer employment at Riverside. Theme three was apparent because the students were attempting to mimic the dog grooming and interpersonal skills of Ms. Scott. This career skill and personal development helped one of the interns gain summer employment at a different pet grooming business.

Discussion

This bounded single case study explored youth-adult relationships in the context of an urban high school agricultural veterinary program. Findings indicated, in this case, student success was a product of multiple youth-adult relationships created through communal environments within the program. The three emerging themes are consistent with previous youth-adult relationship literature. However, the findings were unique in school-based agricultural education research; the teacher and positive adult figures beyond the school worked in unison to enhance urban agriculture students’ personal and cognitive development. The following paragraphs summarize themes across all vignettes, relate themes back to research, and propose recommendations for practice.

Theme 1: Students identified the close relationships formed with adults (the agricultural education teacher and/or adult internship supervisors) as a catalyst for change. The value of the constant presence and close mentoring relationships was evident through statements from multiple participants and field observations. Specific examples included Dana improving her attendance because of Ms. Anderson’s reminder text messages, Mr.

Durant’s positive role modeling for his intern, and Ms. Scott’s efforts to teach grooming skills while concurrently fostering a close relationship with students. Prolonged exposure to multiple positive adult figures was vital to student development within this program. This theme supports previous findings indicating prolonged exposure to positive adult figures led youth to acquire the positive habits of adult mentors (Eccles et al., 1993; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

Theme 2: Participants talked about the close-knit environment created within the agriculture classroom and internship site. Students treated the agriculture classroom as “their space” or a “refuge” in which they “escaped” the other parts of their day. Similarly, at the internship locations, participants regarded the internship atmosphere as one of trust, familial bonds, and openness with adults. For example, one internship supervisor developed trust in the students to let them work independently to groom a customer’s pet. The atmosphere of the veterinary program facilitated emotional engagement of students, supervisors, and teachers, which enhanced the student’s experience. Stan’s description of Ms. Anderson acting as his surrogate mother demonstrated this effect. Previous research indicates teachers and adults who are open, warm, and demonstrate a genuine caring for the well being of their students greatly enhance the cognitive and behavioral engagement of students (Bergin & Bergin, 2012; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Adults who strive to conquer barriers between themselves and youth will ultimately create an environment of mutual trust between youth and adults that can lead to positive development (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

Theme 3: The experiences within the veterinary program empowered students. Examples of student empowerment included Mr. Durant providing his student with advice on how to effectively use the bus system or Stan gaining a future career reference. Rachel and Clarice gained self-confidence from their internship experience and secured summer employment in the animal care industry. Research suggests youth who are able to establish relationships with highly resourced adults outside their home and school gain numerous career and

educational advantages (Fulgini & Eccles, 1993; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005).

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

In this case, adults served as mentors with whom the students felt constant caring support. It was concluded that the crux of the youth-adult relationship was youth feeling a well-developed sense of trust in the adults. This finding aligns with previous research in youth development (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). However, the use of texting by the teacher to maintain contact with students was a form of constant presence not evident in previous research. Texting could be a reflection of the current technologies available and the teacher maximizing her resources to connect with students using age-appropriate methods. The utilization of texting by the teacher was also a culturally-relevant form of communication with the students (Landson-Billings, 1994). Regardless, this finding implies trust, caring, and support are of particular importance in this urban program. Teachers, particularly in smaller, more traditional programs could take the nature of student trust, caring, and support for granted, as people in smaller schools and communities may have a greater likelihood of previous interactions. It would also stand to reason barriers exist in establishing trust in urban areas. It is recommended that future research continue to investigate how trust between students and teachers is established. Further inquiry should also identify what factors may restrict the trust within youth-adult relationships in a variety of settings. The researchers recommend agriculture teachers work to construct meaningful relationships with positive adult role models for their students beyond the four walls of the typical classroom. Some teachers or schools may not feel comfortable with communication methods such as texting. However, teachers should find acceptable methods to facilitate a constant, positive presence in the lives of students to benefit their development and learning.

The attachment formed between the students and adults was potentially a result of the close program and/or internship atmosphere. Research

suggests socially and emotionally supportive learning environments benefit student-teacher attachment (Bergin & Bergin, 2012; Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). Student-teacher attachments are important precursors to student engagement and, ultimately, learning (Zeldin, 2000). This finding implies an open environment is necessary for building relationships. This supportive environment was not created around competition for plaques or awards; rather, the supportive environment was constructed around multiple levels of personal and professional development through collaborative efforts of the agriculture teacher, school staff, and internship supervisors. Students demonstrated high levels of engagement in their experiences and competence in their skills in working with animals. The educational value of well-structured internship experiences and placement SAEs in agriculture programs should not be overlooked. Could similar internship programs in traditional agricultural education programs provide similar developmental benefits? Future research should investigate student experiences during internships and placement SAEs in traditional agriculture programs to ascertain if the impact is unique to this urban setting. The value of students collaborating with highly resourced adults beyond the school should be emphasized to current and future teachers. Teacher educators should require student teaching interns to seek out and secure resourced adults within their placement community. In addition, professional development highlighting internship placement strategies used by Ms. Anderson could provide current teachers practical steps necessary for linking students to positive adult figures.

Finally, the relationships between youth and adults created feelings of enablement and self-efficacy which led to student feelings of personal empowerment. This finding also concurred with previous research (Bergin & Bergin, 2012; Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). Students gained numerous personal and career related resources from working with positive adult figures during internship experiences, which catalyzed their personal and professional success. This finding leads to interesting implications about the nature

of student career self-efficacy and how learning seemingly basic career-related skills could help facilitate student development. The agriculture teacher was well connected with animal care professionals throughout the community, many of whom served as internship supervisors. The teachers' connections with these professionals allowed her to form a "relationship bridge" between students in the veterinary program and the positive adult mentors in the animal care industry. This implies agriculture teachers should make an effort to identify positive, knowledgeable adult mentors beyond the school to serve students as internship supervisors. Furthermore, teachers should seek other adult mentors to aid in agriculture students' development. Future research should continue to illuminate other empowering models for environments and practices, as well as how those environments are established. Agriculture teachers should continue to create such environments and teach skills leading to personal empowerment of students in traditional and nontraditional programs.

Youth-adult relationships are essential for learning and applying knowledge by bridging the gap between the student world in school and the adult world beyond the school (Dewey, 1916; Hartup, 1989; Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005). A growing number of scholars have contributed to the investigation and understanding of youth-adult relationships as they occur in formal and non-formal educational settings. This research supports recent inquiries which attempted to identify strategies for establishing positive youth-adult relationships (Anderson & Sandmann, 2009; Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005; Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005). This study also highlighted the unique role community partnerships play within urban students' career decisions, which was supported in a previous study (MacIver & Farley, 2005). This case study demonstrated how a school-based veterinary program can serve the needs of students in urban areas and provides insight to how agricultural education can continue serving the needs of an ever-changing society (National Research Council, 1988; National Research Council, 2009).

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