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THE DEVELOPMENT PROVIDED TO MENTORS IN THE MENTORING PROCESS BETWEEN PEER

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Abstract: Peer mentoring is a helping process in which a more advanced undergraduate student helps a beginner and proposes to enable the development of all the actors involved in the process. Although the main focus is the mentee, it is known that this process is not limited to the formation of the mentee, bringing significant benefits to the facilitators, the mentors. In addition, in this model, teachers (tutors) participate helping mentors in planning meetings, this relationship is very important for the development of the veteran student. Objective: to evaluate the mentor's perception in the peer mentoring process and how it helps him/her in personal, academic and professional development. Method: a quantitative and qualitative research was carried out with objective and discursive questions, statistically analyzed and divided into categories by Minayo's thematic content analysis. Conclusions of the work: the main skills developed and considered by the mentors as most relevant were communication, empathy, oratory, group dynamics, planning and leadership. Through discourse analysis, three categories were found: Personal development; Academic and professional skills; Reflections on mental health. Thus, it was observed that mentors have the opportunity to develop important skills for their personal and professional development. Reaffirming that mentoring does not only produce benefits for the mentee, but also for the facilitator of the process, the mentor.

Keywords: Mentoring mentors. Mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Peer mentoring is a helping process in which a more advanced undergraduate student (mentor) assists a beginning student (mentee) in their personal, academic and professional

development (MARTINS, 2014; BELLODI, 2005). The peer-mentoring process helps the mentee to integrate into the university environment, as the mentor presents the customs and the guide, generating greater security for facing adversity (MAILLARD, 2014). The peer mentoring model evaluated in this research presents three main actors: tutor (teacher), mentor (veteran) and mentees (newcomers). The tutor is the teacher who participates in the planning of mentoring meetings and guides the mentors, in addition, they participate in some meetings. The mentors are up to three students who participate in the planning and conduct the thematic mentoring meetings and the mentees form a group of up to 15 newcomers who received mentorship in the first semester of graduation.

Mentoring meetings are organized in three moments: conversation circle, presentation of applications and tools and debriefing. The mentors present the triggering topic for the conversation circle, which is always a difficulty for the newcomer, such as: organization of study time, developing focus, mental health. After discussing and sharing their experiences on the subject, they present practical applications and tools that can help newcomers to face these difficulties. Finally, the debriefing is the formative feedback moment, in which the participants will put their individual impressions about the meeting and give suggestions to improve the next meetings. Thus, both mentees and mentors will be able to develop their interpersonal communication skills, empathy, ability to give and receive feedback, self-knowledge and teamwork, since everyone has space to share their difficulties and seek solutions together with the group (CRUZ; ZALDO, 2012).

Thus, the general objective of this research was to evaluate the perception of mentors from Medicine, Bachelor of

Science and Technology, Ecology and Biotechnology courses on their experience in the peer mentoring process. The specific objectives were to assess how the peer mentoring project helped the mentor's academic and professional development and also his personal development, as well as the mental health, interpersonal and family relationships. This theme, mainly, bringing the mentor's perception is still little discussed in scientific studies and its analysis and discussion becomes imperative, since it is an unprecedented, non-mandatory peer mentoring model, offered as an extracurricular project and having several courses involved. It is essential to know how peer mentoring contributed to the personal, academic and professional development of the mentor. And so, collaborate with existing initiatives and encourage others focused on mentoring.

For this, the descriptive research methodology of qualitative and quantitative nature was used. Academics who participated as mentors in the peer mentoring project were invited to participate in the research by sending a text message via E-mail and WhatsApp and answered a Google Forms questionnaire containing objective and discursive questions about their perception of the project and skills. that were developed in the process in their opinion. The objective questions were submitted to statistical analysis and treated in an Excel spreadsheet, the discursive ones by Minayo's thematic content analysis. This technique proposed by Minayo includes three stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results obtained and their interpretation (MINAYO, 2010). Participants were 53 academics from Medicine (19), Bachelor of Science and Technology (26), Engineering (3), Biotechnology (3) and Ecology (2) who were mentors (2nd-10th period) in Peer's

project -mentoring in the periods 2018.1 to 2019.2 (on-site) and 2020.1 (remote emergency). Exclusion criteria were being under 18 years of age and no longer enrolled in the course at the researched university. The research followed the guidelines and regulatory norms of Resolution No. 466/12 of the National Health Council regarding research with human beings, which includes the basic principles of bioethics: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. Participants gave consent through the Free and Informed Consent Term, TCLE, previously explained and detailed for each participant.

Using the methodology in categories, the results and discussion of the article were developed in subtitles according to the categories found: Personal development; Academic and professional skills; Reflections on mental health.

DEVELOPMENT

Most of the research participants recognize that the peer mentoring process has helped them in their personal, academic and professional development as described in Table 1. This confirms that the project benefits veteran students involved in the process in the mentoring role, as proposed. The main skills developed are described in graph 1, in which the mentors pointed out as the most relevant communication, empathy, oratory, group dynamics, planning and leadership. What was expected by the researchers since the mentor students are responsible for conducting the mentoring meetings, presenting the themes and encouraging the participation and interaction of the mentees. The planning of the meetings is carried out together with the tutor (teacher), in which the mentors have an active participation and can improve their ability to plan, lead and interact with students and teachers.

	Yes	No	Little	Total
Academic and professional	52	0	1	53
Personal	50	2	1	53

Table 1. Mentor development.

Source: Author's research data.



Graph 1. Skills developed by the mentor in peer mentoring.

Source: Author's research data.

The mentors considered participation in the peer mentoring project positive and observed that this process helped in their personal, academic and professional development. From the data analysis, it was possible to verify three categories: Personal development; Academic and professional skills; Reflections on mental health.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Peer mentoring aims at the personal development of all the actors involved in the process, it helped mentors in relation to empathy, self-management and self-knowledge that are important in the formation of the individual and in interpersonal relationships in different contexts. Participants highlighted that having the opportunity to know the difficulties, thoughts and realities of mentees was important for developing empathy.

“It helped me to see different situations that students go through, making me have more empathy and to relate better to other people.” E31

“The subjects that were dealt with are very important, the ability to adapt the dialogue and deal with such different people helps to develop empathy and study themes that have helped me personally.” E41

“Through the difficulties of others, I realized that I need to be more attentive to other people, being more empathetic and not judging and labeling people prematurely.” E51

Empathy was identified as one of the main skills developed by mentors in the peer mentoring process, knowing the difficulties of other students and sharing experiences was reported as an important aspect for this. Acherman (2021) points out that students who seek mentoring have a worse perception of social support and that the mentor has the role of a positive example, academic guide, helping them to have a better balance between personal and educational activities. Thus, empathy has a fundamental place in this relationship, as beginners have the need to be noticed, to feel inserted in the academic

environment, therefore, being a mentor is having a genuine interest in the development of their minds.

Another important contribution for the veteran students was the process of self-knowledge and proactivity, as they reported that participating in the meetings made them reflect on their own academic and professional training and seek other opportunities in the university environment.

“Participating as a mentor in the lives of freshmen made me realize how much easier my life could have been if someone at that time had helped me, this was important for me to know the mistakes I made and the ones I was still making and I hadn’t realized because I hadn’t still observed with a certain distance” E23

“Yes, it helps to the extent that I felt empowered to help other people and to review attitudes that I did wrong and was forced to abandon them, due to peer mentoring training.” E32

“It made me feel more capable of accomplishing things that I didn’t think possible before.” E55

“It made me discover extension and teaching projects at the university that even I did not know, because I was looking for information to pass on to the mentees and in the end I was the one who knew new things” E13

“I feel that I have become a better and more proactive person” E45

Mentors need to study personal planning topics, schedule organization, study schedule and focus to discuss in mentoring meetings and present tools that help in this self-management process. Survey participants said these studies helped them discover new strategies and make more effective personal planning.

“Through him it was possible to improve my academic development, as I learned

better to manage time; develop better study techniques; know my strengths and limitations; improve interpersonal skills and focus.” E39

“My personal planning is more elaborate thanks to ways I learned in peer mentoring” E19

“It contributed a lot to my time management” E29

In this way, mentors improved academic and personal self-management. Therefore, the two students involved - mentor and mentee - achieve more autonomy in their learning process. Peer mentoring rescues the purposes of collaboration and cooperative learning, facilitates the learning of different study strategies and enables a greater bond between students. Therefore, it becomes an important educational agent in higher education (FIOR, 2017). The mentor has the opportunity to better understand the educational process, to meet and re-encounter with their own difficulties, and in this context they can see themselves in the injured newcomer and be able to take care, thus transforming and being transformed in this process (GONÇALVES; BELLODI 2012). Characteristics also observed in the mentors of the research by Souza and Reali (2020) who developed empathy for their mentees, produced reflections and strategies with them to solve the educational difficulties faced and acquired new communication and virtual interaction skills. As was presented in the speech of the mentors, the project made them reflect on themselves and their academic trajectory. For, the exchange of experiences in groups leads to the deepening of self-knowledge, sharing of strategies to face the problems experienced at the university and the search for new opportunities in the academic environment.

Another important aspect for personal development and the feeling of belonging are interpersonal relationships, fundamental in

welcoming and in the academic environment, since it presents spaces, opportunities and promotes social well-being. Research by Soares (2016), carried out with psychology students, observed that friendships are facilitated by similarities in opinions, social status, personal and professional interests. And they are hampered in the long run by the formation of closed groups, as the members find it difficult to interact with each other. Another obstacle is interpersonal communication and having few practical activities that develop social skills in the course. The interviewees of this research observed that the peer mentoring process, in addition to promoting friendships, developed communication skills that facilitated interpersonal relationships in other spaces of the university.

Students who had difficulties in interpersonal relationships reported that the project helped them to interact with colleagues, both within the project and in other academic environments.

“I felt like a more closed person to talk to others and had difficulty in a personal relationship, in a discussion, for example, the project helped me to develop a more accessible and comfortable relationship with people” E18

“Yes, it allowed a greater approximation of the people whom

I always had some difficulty” E3

“Yes, for stimulating social relationships between students from different periods and teachers.” E39

The interviewees were able to develop friendships and partnerships from the project that were maintained after the mentoring meetings were completed. In addition, relationships with other students gave them a sense of belonging to the university environment.

“Yes, because I made some friends that helped me a lot throughout the course” E27

“It was very helpful in understanding academic life and in establishing relationships between veteran and new students.” E32

“Yea. Through mentoring I had the opportunity to meet other people and feel more included in the academic environment.” E55

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

The mentor to perform his role in peer mentoring needs to study, research group dynamics, tools and applications related to the topic. In addition to planning the meeting, presenting the topic, encouraging the interaction of the mentees, receiving and giving feedback. These assignments lead them to develop skills that are very important for academic and professional life. Thus, the peer mentoring group exposes the mentor to many communication experiences, from training before the meetings, to the mentoring planning moment, in which he needs to dialogue with two other mentors and the tutor to define the approach to the topic, until the conduct of the meeting with the new entrants.

“The communication skills that are worked on, the experience of coordinating a dialogue group, the topics covered and the training I think help a lot.” E41

“Mainly when it comes to feedback, interpersonal and communication skills. We mentors always need to be ready to receive criticism as we are working in a group dynamic.” E46

“As a project that involves a lot of relationships between people, there is a great incentive to improve our interaction and communication” E14

“I was able to develop and qualify some personal aspects such as public speaking, public speaking, among others.” E35

“Improved oratory a lot” E7

“It helped me in my way of communicating and introducing myself to people” E40

The exams that assess the competences of recent medical graduates, such as the USA (USMLE), Canada (MCCQE), São Paulo/Brazil (CREMESP), consider interpersonal communication and communication with the patient mandatory for an adequate diagnosis (BALZAN; WANDERCIL, 2019). Interpersonal and public communication was pointed out by the mentors as one of the most developed skills during the peer mentoring project, as can be seen in the interviewees' statements. This skill is important in the job market, especially for professionals who interact with and/or lead work or research teams.

“It works on our communication skills, empathy and sociability that are very precious for our academic and professional development” E16

“Making me develop better oratory and teamwork with other mentors and tutors” E10

“I made amazing friends who helped me a lot during the semesters, I developed a lot of skills, like speaking in

public” E24

“Speaking skills, leadership and better interpersonal skills are essential for my future profession and mentoring gave me the opportunity to develop these skills.” E50

Contemporary companies have understood that human resources and the effective interaction of work teams are important to achieve the desired results. Therefore, they are necessary skills for university students who

want to enter the job market (FONSECA, 2016). Mentors highlighted that the peer mentoring process is a practical opportunity to develop teamwork and leadership skills. It is worth mentioning that practical activities aimed at this purpose are little explored in the curricula of Engineering, Biotechnology and Ecology courses, which focus more on technical training to perform tasks.

MENTAL HEALTH

The peer mentoring process proved to be beneficial for the mental health of mentors, since knowing the difficulties of mentees and exposing their experiences gave them the opportunity to reframe their own difficulties and face them.

“While I participated and helped others, I was at the same time learning and helping myself” E5

“It allowed me to realize that I was not the only one to go through those common problems of academic life” E3

“From the moment we connect to other people, we can both feel more relieved and create bonds that make us able to deal with problems better” E10

“Because when studying to be a mentor, we also end up learning how to deal with problems such as anxiety” E15

“Sharing experiences, listening to others, the moment of dialogue and integration with other students of the course served as support and motivation.” E41

The main aspect cited by the mentors as something beneficial to mental health was the group relationship provided by peer mentoring, because even being as mediators of the meetings, they felt strengthened and encouraged by their colleagues. This converges with the study by Sahão and Kienen (2021) that places the support network as the main facilitator of adaptation to the academic

context and problems related to interpersonal relationships as the main obstacle to this process.

Another point made was loneliness, many mentors said that peer mentoring reduces this feeling by providing the sharing of anguish, knowing that the other goes through similar situations and that they can turn to other people in difficult times. What is observed in other mentoring projects, being able to share anguish, doubts, anxieties, difficulties, listening and being heard gives a feeling of acceptance and that you are not alone (SILVA et al, 2021). The group relationship makes the participants know that they are not alone in facing problems, that they can ask for help and support each other. In addition, mentors reported that they feel more self-confident in solving their own problems and difficulties.

“The fact that the meetings take place in groups reinforces the idea that it is easier to overcome everything with the help and support of classmates, veterans and teachers. Feedback moments are very important so that people don't feel like they are going through certain situations alone, so that they can share experiences that can help each other. Reporting and listening to reports helps to “take off the weight” that we usually carry due to dissatisfaction with situations or with our own performance” E31

“The group dynamic for me is the main factor. People see meetings as a place of freedom to express feelings and outbursts, and this often brings people together and they realize that they are not alone, this integrative process contributes to solving the mental health problem” E50

“It helps to know that you are not alone in this, having a secure foothold and understanding triggers that the university can trigger” E24

“From the moment you realize that you are not alone and that there are people willing to

help, especially with regard to the anxieties of the university” E53

“You are heard there, so it feeds tremendous self-confidence” E18

According to Padovani et al (2014), intermediate level stress was the most common among university students and burnout symptoms were observed in 5% of the evaluated medical students. It is known that chronic stress triggers anxiety and depression, which are recurrent mental health problems in this population. Thus, what can be seen is that university students are more prone to mental health problems, but they seek strategies to minimize them, since the minority has disabling conditions. According to the mentors' report, peer mentoring contributes as a strategy to minimize mental health problems, reducing stress, anxiety and disseminating tools to minimize them.

Another important factor for mental health is satisfactory affective relationships and the geographic distance from the family is a negative factor for the student's mental health (PADOVANI et al, 2014; NOGUEIRA, 2017). Mentors reported that the knowledge and personal skills developed in peer mentoring indirectly help in affective relationships, as they improve self-management and reduce stress and this positively impacts the family context. Some interviewees reported that the communication, empathy and other skills developed in the project improved their family relationships, which also cooperates with the student's well-being and mental health.

“It made me a more empathetic and caring person with my family members” E3

“It provided more patience and empathy when dealing with my family members” E51

“Less conflicts with my family” E42

“It helped me to be calmer and to get home calmer and calmer” E5

“Through the project I was able to promote intrapersonal skills and interpersonal relationships that served as a reflection in my family space, in addition to improving the ability to be more empathetic and understanding” E39

Other mentors did not observe direct changes in relation to the family relationship, as they already had a satisfactory relationship, so they did not perceive any changes, some mentioned that other skills indirectly brought benefits.

“I had no family problems, so it only helped me with communication” E18

“In peer mentoring meetings, planning, routine, organization, balance are discussed, and a student who is better able to plan his studies and his routine can thus organize himself more efficiently and have more time for his family.” E50

“I don’t think so, but I had no problem at hand. However, I noticed that it was useful for colleagues who reported family problems” E12

“Yes, because it presented several resources for self-care, in addition to healthy group interaction” E30

Therefore, peer mentoring proves to be very relevant in the mentor’s personal and professional development. Other initiatives that present a similar model in which veterans help freshmen or students who are in previous periods obtained similar results, such as improvement of self-knowledge, social skills, communication and greater integration into the university environment (MARTINS, et al, 2021) (LEITE; FRANZOI), 2022). Thus, peer mentoring is a space for improvement in the training of undergraduate students, whether beginners or veterans.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The *peer mentoring* is beneficial for the personal, academic and professional development of mentors, it was possible to observe that the relationship provided by this process increased empathy for their peers. In addition, reflecting, researching materials and tools made the mentors develop more self-knowledge, self-management and improve their interpersonal relationships. The group relationship and discussing the difficulties collaborated with the mentor’s mental health and even in his relationship outside the university context, such as with his family members. Another positive aspect of mentoring was being a space to develop communication, leadership, group dynamics and other skills that are highly valued by the job market. Improving the university experience of the students involved in the process and encouraging them to face new challenges. Thus, mentoring is a process that can help both mentee and mentor, especially in this peer-to-peer context in which both actors are in the process of academic and professional training. There are few studies on the perception of mentors in the mentoring process, and more research is needed to assess how it can help in the training of undergraduate students and provide practical experiences that will be very important for professional life in different areas of knowledge. Since this model is developed in several undergraduate courses such as Medicine, Bachelor of Science and Technology, Biotechnology and Ecology, and even with the technical differences between the areas of knowledge, the mentors were able to similarly take advantage of the experience and skills developed.

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