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MENTEE PERSPECTIVES OF A FIRST-YEAR PEER MENTORING PROGRAM FOR EDUCATION DOCTORAL (EDD) STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	In this paper, we examine how first-year education doctoral (EdD) students in a peer mentoring program may be supported in the academic and psychosocial domains to increase timely degree completion, decrease attrition, and improve the EdD program for students and faculty.
Background	EdD students often face unique trials based on academic, social, professional, and personal challenges that arise during their degree program. The paper addresses how peer mentoring programs may help students overcome these challenges while completing their EdD program.
Methodology	To investigate the effectiveness of a peer mentoring program for students, we focused on a single case study of an EdD peer mentoring program with 11 first-year EdD students who participated in the program. Using mixed methods, we collected and analyzed data from pre- and post-surveys, individual interviews, and a focus group.
Contribution	Few studies about peer mentoring programs for EdD students exist. This study is unique because it focuses on first-year EdD students' perspectives and, unlike other studies on peer mentoring programs, peer mentors are defined as graduates of the EdD program or current EdD students who are further along in the program. Whilst many studies of peer mentoring recommend peer mentoring for new students, our findings suggest that in the case of EdD students, extended or later peer mentoring may be more beneficial.

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Findings	From the quantitative and qualitative data results, five themes related to mentee perspectives of the benefits of EdD peer mentoring program emerged: 1) receiving academic advice and program support; 2) focusing on the future; 3) receiving emotional support and work-life balance advice; 4) having an experienced and relatable mentor; and 5) needing more mentoring to derive benefits. While mentees reported positive feelings about the mentoring program, many expressed that they did not yet have a need for mentoring. Considering that most mentoring studies focus on early program mentees, these results present the possibility of a need for extended or later-program mentoring. Based on the data, we identified a need for additional research which focuses on determining the correct timing for EdD students to begin peer mentoring program since students take coursework during their first year and have not begun work in the dissertation phase of the program.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Sustainability of peer mentoring programs can present challenges based on the time and needs of mentees, mentors, and faculty. Doctoral faculty should evaluate the benefits of an EdD peer mentoring program for mentees on a regular basis to ensure that the program effectively supports and guides mentees to degree completion.
Recommendations for Researchers	Literature and research on the evaluation, impact, and value of peer mentoring programs for EdD students and first-year doctoral students are limited. Researchers could study further the perspectives of mentees in an EdD peer mentoring program throughout their degree program from taking coursework to writing a dissertation. The benefits of early-program mentoring in comparison to later-program mentoring could be investigated further.
Impact on Society	Providing mentoring opportunities to EdD students may help them overcome academic, social, and emotional challenges, and in turn, allow more education leaders to successfully complete their EdD and use their education to improve their school communities.
Future Research	Future studies should examine other options of mentoring programs for first-year EdD students and EdD students who completed their EdD coursework and are working on their dissertation. Longitudinal studies are also needed to track mentees' progression throughout the program.

Keywords	doctoral program, EdD, education doctorate, mentee, mentor, peer mentoring, program evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Education doctoral (EdD) students' abilities to effectively balance the responsibilities and commitments of their school, work, and personal lives may present challenges (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Kerrigan & Hayes, 2016; Welton, Mansfield, Lee, & Young, 2015). Such challenges that EdD students may encounter while working towards the degree include maintaining a full-time job while taking coursework, raising and supporting a family, and experiencing shifts in careers and employers. EdD students may complete their degree programs while working full-time or part-time positions in a variety of education-related positions due to the practitioner-scholar focus of such programs (Bista & Cox, 2014; Christie, 2014; Kerrigan & Hayes, 2016).

In addition to working with faculty, doctoral students may benefit from talking with students who are further along in the EdD program or with EdD graduates to discuss academic, career, and personal goals and situations that arise as they work toward a timely completion of the program. Current doctoral students and graduates can serve as mentors and share insights and experiences regarding how

to effectively navigate the path to completion of a doctorate with incoming students. Since current students and graduates are familiar with the EdD program structure, coursework, and dissertation process, they can describe their personal experiences related to the EdD program, career, and socio-emotional issues with incoming students to help them anticipate and prepare for the challenges of the program. The unique peer-to-peer relationship may allow students to communicate differently with peer mentors than they might with faculty (Fleck & Mullins, 2012). Mentors can discuss work-personal life balance techniques, problem solving strategies, and examples of how they or other colleagues addressed specific situations with incoming students (Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014).

Based on research about challenges doctoral students face (e.g., Pifer & Baker, 2016; Welton et al., 2015), we designed and implemented a peer mentoring program for first-year doctoral educational administration and supervision students. This program was the first of its kind in our Department of Educational Leadership. We developed our program based on the conceptualization of peer mentoring as follows.

Peer mentoring is a relationship between a more experienced student (mentor) who supports a less experienced student (mentee) to (a) orient to a new program, (b) be academically successful, (c) balance work, personal life, and academics (socio-emotional needs), and (d) relate academics to a career path (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Fleck & Mullins, 2012; Noonan, Ballinger, & Black, 2007; Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to examine how the creation of a peer mentoring program may support new EdD students in both the academic and psychosocial domains with the goal of decreasing attrition among education doctoral students and contributing to continuous education doctoral program improvement. First, we outlined our key considerations in the evaluation and perceived benefits of our peer mentoring program during its first year of implementation with EdD students. Second, we analyzed the perceived benefits of this program based on quantitative and qualitative data collected from the mentees to develop a better understanding of students' needs and support options available to successfully complete the EdD program. Scholars have investigated the characteristics, benefits, challenges, and learning of mentors in peer mentoring programs (Booth, Merga, & Mat Roni, 2016; Christie, 2014; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Lowery, Geesa, & McConnell, 2018; Terrion & Leonard, 2007), but limited research about peer mentoring programs for education doctoral students exists. As the purpose of this study was to understand how mentees were supported in the first year of an education doctoral peer mentoring program that was designed to support their success, we did not include mentor perspectives.

We investigated three research questions in this study:

> 1) How does the education doctoral peer mentor/mentee relationship develop mentees personally, professionally, and/or academically?
> 2) How does education doctoral peer mentoring help mentees navigate the following domains regarding the EdD program: a) academic, b) emotional/personal, and c) career?
> 3) In what ways do education doctoral mentees' experiences assist the Department of Educational Leadership faculty in continuous program improvement?

Significance of This Study

Research about the population studied in this study is not represented widely in the literature about peer mentoring. Although education doctoral students are participants in a few studies (Booth et al., 2016; Noonan et al., 2007; Preston, Ogenchuk, & Nsiah, 2014), little is known about the value of peer mentoring for education doctoral students in an educational leadership program designed to prepare principals and superintendents in public P-12 institutions in the United States. This study, which focuses on that population is an important addition to existing literature because in contrast to studies of education doctoral students who are full-time graduate students seeking to enter the professorship, our participants were full-time working practitioners who do not have immediate plans to

leave their practice and enter the professorship. This study, which examines the experiences of students who fit this demographic and the ways in which they anticipate peer mentoring to help prepare and support them to achieve the EdD in this context, contributes to this gap in the literature. Other scholars have recommended that research examine these questions. Erickson and Travick-Jackson (2006), who investigated leadership development of educational leadership doctoral students who were peer mentors, recommended that future studies include questions such as "What is the impact of the mentoring process on field-dependent [practitioners] and field-independent doctoral students" (p. 268).

Due to the general profile of education doctoral students who are often school or district leaders with heavy career demands, further study of the ways in which peer mentoring might be beneficial in increasing retention is warranted. Additionally, as we will discuss later, characteristics of our peer mentoring program were unique from other peer mentoring programs in extant literature. Our definition of *peer* included recent graduates of the program in addition to current students who were farther along in the EdD program. In our extensive search, we were not able to find any programs that defined *peer* in this way.

Finally, this study is significant because it augments research regarding education doctoral students and peer mentoring in a context where they do not participate in research apprenticeship through the traditional mentoring that occurs between doctoral students and their advisors. These unique characteristics warrant study of the extent to which mentees are supported and the perceived benefits of such a program in order to inform practice and research regarding peer mentorship. It is important to apply findings regarding the extent to which benefits, if any, can be ascertained for mentees in peer mentoring programs that are relevant to the unique characteristics of educational leadership doctoral students who are not traditional full-time students. Furthermore, Booth et al. (2016) underscored the importance of further research about different peer mentoring models. They recommend that further research is needed that explores "the impact of peer-support on client experiences, comparison of the efficacy of different peer-support models, and the features of peer-support models that offer the greatest benefits" (p. 399) for everyone involved in the program. Our exploration of our program, because of its unique characteristics, is a contribution to this recommended area of research. The literature related to mentoring program evaluation is in the next section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has been conducted about various aspects of peer mentoring in colleges and universities, including the experiences, benefits, and challenges of: undergraduate students (Christie, 2014; Cutright & Evans, 2016; Jacobi, 1991); underrepresented students (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007); early career faculty (Bottoms et al., 2013); underrepresented faculty (Murakami & Nuñez, 2014; Packer-Williams & Evans, 2011); peer mentoring in the online environment (Smailes & Gannon-Leary, 2011); traits and benefits of peer mentoring for mentees, and peer mentors (Booth et al., 2016; Bunting, Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2012; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). As previously discussed, few studies with EdD students as participants exist however (Booth et al., 2016; Noonan et al., 2007; Preston et al, 2014). In this section, we review literature related to the benefits, challenges, and experiences of mentees and mentors in peer mentoring programs in an effort add to research related to peer mentoring programs for educational doctoral students.

BENEFITS OF PEER MENTORING FOR MENTEES

Much of the research about the benefits of peer mentoring for mentees and mentors comes from research in undergraduate education. When implemented in academic settings, peer mentoring programs are most often used to develop personal connections, career decisions, and student empowerment (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Common characteristics of peer mentors that benefit mentees may range from the practical (e.g., flexibility and communication) to the emotional (e.g., empathy and trustworthiness) to the social (e.g., personality match with mentee and supportiveness). While peer

mentors often assist mentees with academic support (Christie, 2014; Colvin & Ashman, 2010), one of the most profound ways peer mentors impact their mentees is through social support. This is because peer-to-peer mentorship often offers a more casual and egalitarian relationship than that of a faculty-to-student mentorship (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

The benefits of peer mentoring in graduate programs are increasingly being researched (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Holley & Caldwell, 2012). Graduate school mentors may come from many different roles and backgrounds, which include professors, academic advisors, alumni, and peers. Although these different mentoring roles serve a variety of purposes for the graduate mentee, graduate programs tend to rely on peer mentoring for a main benefit: to create an inclusive environment of social support in addition to academic support (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2000) found that mentees in high-contact mentorship relationships were more likely to be satisfied with their graduate program overall. Although it is underexplored in comparison to the research on mentees, the benefits to mentors and the challenges faced by participants and organizers of peer mentoring programs have been investigated (Bunting et al., 2012; Colvin & Ashman, 2010) and are described below.

Benefits of Peer Mentoring for Peer Mentors

Increased learning is one benefit for peer mentors (Erickson & Travick-Jackson, 2006). Bunting et al. (2012) cited anecdotally that peer mentors at their university "often reported learning far more than the first-year students whom they mentored" (p. 62). In their empirical study, they found that peer mentors learned "vicariously" (p. 65) through self-reflection from their mentee's experiences, learned how to be change agents, and learned the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning.

The benefits of self-reflective practice for mentors are highlighted in other studies (Booth et al., 2016; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Couchman, 2009). Booth et al. (2016) found that peer mentoring enhanced their learning, promoted reflective practice, and supported their research skills. Likewise, Colvin and Ashman (2010) found that mentors benefitted from applying mentoring concepts and learning to their own lives by "being able to support students, reapplying concepts in their own lives, and developing connections themselves" (p. 127). Other benefits include the satisfaction of providing a service to students, increased confidence, making social connections with others through the program, and the development of empathy (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Couchman, 2009). In the following section, we explore challenges that may be presented from peer mentoring programs despite the benefits.

Critiques and Challenges of Peer Mentoring Programs

As mentoring has become increasingly popular, "critical investigations of mentoring have been limited" (Christie, 2014, p. 956) but some studies highlight concerns. Christie (2014) investigated a mentoring project for undergraduate students in the United Kingdom and identified three issues of power and control inherent in a peer mentoring program that should be examined. First, the program structure included one project officer who coordinated the program, "thus presenting a hegemonic discourse" (p. 958) about the centrality of the role. Second, because the mentor was perceived as an expert who inducts the mentee into the culture and expectations of the university, mentoring also benefitted the university because new students (mentees) became acculturated to the university's established practices. Third, problems arose from the construction of mentors as experts because mentees often expected academic help and tutoring, and they became over-dependent on mentors for academic support. This made it difficult for both mentees and mentors to negotiate the boundaries of their roles. The need for clear boundaries is supported by earlier researchers who found that clear explanations of roles, responsibilities, and boundaries are important for the facilitation of successful mentor-mentee relationships (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Reid, 2008; Storrs, Putsche, & Taylor, 2008).

The delineation of roles and boundaries could be part of mentor training programs that highlight important mentor characteristics. Terrion and Leonard (2007) conducted a review of literature to identify "the abundant student peer mentor descriptors found in mentoring research" (p. 149). Many of the characteristics, such as commitment, self-motivation, or academic achievement, appear to be innate. However, the researchers question whether mentor characteristics are innate or learned; while they also assert that the taxonomy of mentor characteristics that emerged from the review "is critical to decision making about the selection, training, and evaluation of peer mentors" (p. 162). For example, Terrion and Leonard explain that the characteristic *interdependency* can be developed by program staff: "This characteristic reflects the reciprocal nature of peer relationships and the need for program staff to help the mentors develop themselves personally and professionally" (p. 158). Whether or not mentoring characteristics can be taught, at minimum, identified research-based characteristics are a logical starting point for the training of mentors. Next, we turn to a summary of research on doctoral peer mentoring programs.

Doctoral Peer Mentoring Programs

The benefits and experiences of students involved in doctoral peer mentoring programs demonstrate that there is potential to support doctoral student success (Mullen & Tuten, 2010), although this is also an area of research that is underexplored. Some of the most significant characteristics of peer mentoring programs are bridging the gaps between doctoral students' paths, validating worries and fears, and offering encouragement and support. Although mentors are usually tasked with providing educational support and leadership development, they may additionally act as counselors, role models, and friends. In fact, mentees rate social support and networking as the most important factors of the mentoring relationship (Erickson & Travick-Jackson, 2006; Fleck & Mullins, 2012).

Participants in one study of a doctoral mentoring program did not view peer mentors as traditional educational support, but rather viewed them as a source of informal social support and advice (Webb, Wangmo, Ewen, Teaster, & Hatch, 2009). Socioemotional support is often critical to the success of graduate students, and peer mentoring may act as a socialization or induction process in which mentors model for mentees the behaviors of healthy social interaction and support-seeking methods. Peer mentoring not only assists in the socioemotional support of doctoral students, as it can produce tangible program benefits as well. Dorn and Papalewis (1997) found that peer mentoring and group cohesiveness were correlated with higher rates of goal completion. Mentees formed close, one-on-one relationships with mentors from previous cohorts, and this sense of belongingness and support "improve[d] task completion while it promote[d] team building practices" (p. 1).

Pifer and Baker (2016) characterized the challenges doctoral students face in three stages. First, students acquire knowledge, often in traditional forms of teaching and learning. This is generally when students are most comfortable because they are familiar with taking courses. Second, students transition from structured coursework to collaborative work with faculty on research projects. Third, students transition to the work of scholars and complete their dissertation. While the first and third stages apply to many EdD students, the second stage often is missing since EdD students typically move from coursework directly into the dissertation or capstone project. Furthermore, studies about EdD peer mentoring programs are extremely limited. The challenges faced with this transition, and how peer mentoring may be beneficial, are described below.

How peer mentoring addresses challenges doctoral students face

Although a few studies about peer mentoring in graduate studies have included students in doctoral programs, far fewer have focused on the unique experiences of education doctoral students, who are often not full-time students seeking to enter academia (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Kerrigan & Hayes, 2016; Lowery et al., 2018). Thus, their circumstances and needs can be invisible in higher education institutions that, for the most part, operate from an assumption that they train students who are "young and enrolled full time" (Neumann & Rodwell, 2009, p. 56). While some EdD students are

former professionals or full-time students, many EdD students may be school, district, state, or national-level educators, educational service providers, administrators, or researchers. As Gardner & Gopaul (2012) noted, part-time doctoral students, in general, "have been found to have dissimilar experiences from their full-time counterparts" (p. 65).

As a result, EdD students who are full-time educators while pursuing the doctorate, often face exacerbated or unique challenges. First, different expectations about research may lead to difficulties between students and faculty because faculty in such programs are more likely to hold conventional conceptions of a researcher identity rather than practitioner-oriented conceptions that allow students to apply research to their professional contexts (Kerrigan & Hayes, 2016). Second, students in such programs are often not looking to shift their identity from professional to educational researcher. Rather they seek to further develop their existing identity as an experienced professional (Kerrigan & Hayes, 2016). Third, the highly structured pace of EdD coursework, which often privileges problem-centered application, does not afford students extended opportunities to explore methodologies prior to developing their dissertation or capstone project (Bernauer, Semich, Klentzin, & Holdan, 2013). This lack of exposure to research is exacerbated in programs where classes are held off campus, because "the development of relationships with other scholars beyond their immediate classroom contact is minimal" (Bernauer et al., 2013, p. 175). A fourth set of challenges EdD students face are psychosocial concerns. As with other doctoral students, EdD students find it challenging to balance work and life. Gardner and Gopaul (2012) explained that, "given their often challenging schedules that require full-time employment, part-time doctoral students often find themselves struggling to balance their roles as student and professional" (p. 65).

The few studies about education doctorate students and peer mentoring programs demonstrate that there is potential for peer mentoring to address the above challenges in meaningful ways. Erickson and Travick-Jackson (2006) asserted, "in practitioner programs, it is easy to lose students to the rigors of their profession coupled with family responsibility" (p. 264). However, Mullen and Tuten (2010) found that a doctoral cohort mentoring program increased feelings of connectedness, mutual support, and accountability that might address these challenges. Studies related to education doctoral peer mentoring are needed to better support and guide EdD students, as practitioner-scholars, throughout their degree program. Therefore, we have reason to believe that EdD students' experiences in a peer mentoring for practitioner-scholars may provide guidance to better balance work, school, and personal obligations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We analyzed our findings using the conceptual framework of "mentor behavior and characteristics" in doctoral education peer mentoring programs, which was developed by Yob and Crawford (2012, p. 38). The framework was developed based on a literature review of research about higher education students in mentoring programs that was published after 2005 and focused on mentoring doctoral students across disciplines. While Yob and Crawford (2012) did not find differences in mentoring across disciplines, the authors asserted the framework should be further tested across disciplines and contexts.

The framework consists of two domains – academic and psychosocial. The academic domain includes the "technical and informational functions of the mentor that support mentee development of appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Yob & Crawford, 2012, p. 38). There are four attributes within the academic domain: competence, availability, induction, and challenge. The framework includes a detailed explanation of each attribute, but a short summary of each attribute is explained in the following paragraph.

Competence refers to general knowledge of the mentee's field of research, institutional knowledge, and, for students in online environments, knowledge about technology. *Availability* means the extent to which mentors are responsive or present to meet or have contact with mentees, particularly in the

online environment through electronic or phone communication. *Induction* is the way in which the mentor facilitates the development of the mentee's career and professional trajectory through a variety of behaviors, such as modeling appropriate behaviors, connecting them to professional contacts, exposing them to professional and academic opportunities, and, related to competence, exposing mentees to institutional culture and expectations. While we wondered specifically about the role of the peer mentor to support a mentee's navigation and development of his or her career as separate from academics, we conceptualized this domain like the authors' domain (Fleck & Mullins, 2012). Finally, *challenge* refers to the ways in which the mentor challenges "the mentee to continue to grow" (Yob & Crawford, 2012, p. 41) by using constructive criticism and/or questioning, in the context of a collegial, supportive relationship.

The psychosocial domain "includes the qualities and skills in building and sustaining interpersonal relationships, and the values, attitudes, and affects involved in mentoring" (Yob & Crawford, 2012, p. 41). This domain consists of three attributes: personal qualities, communication, and emotional support. Again, a summary of each attribute, which is described in more detail in the article, follows.

Personal qualities are the characteristics that are important for creating and building relationships. The authors specifically identify trust, respect, openness, interest, and "the mentor's comfort with the mentee's growing independence" as important personal qualities for the mentor/mentee relationship (Yob & Crawford, 2012, p. 42). *Communication* is related to personal qualities and includes several aspects of communication such as active listening, comfort with silence, and paying attention to body language. Finally, *emotional support* includes those mentor behaviors that support the emotional wellbeing of the mentee. This support is important when the mentee faces failure, a lack of confidence, or uncertainty. Encouragement is a particularly important aspect of emotional support. Other aspects of emotional support include counseling and boundary crossing, where mentor and mentee share aspects of their lives and the mentor becomes a personal confidante. Yob and Crawford's (2012) explanation of the mentor as a counselor has been problematized because of the lack of training mentors may have. Because of the potential dangers found in the literature and our practical experience in school settings where counseling is left to those expertly trained to do so, in our training session, we instructed our mentors to refrain from counseling, particularly regarding any emerging mental health issues. Regarding boundary crossing, we neither encouraged nor discouraged this because the peer mentors were not faculty, and therefore no conflict of interest regarding academics was possible.

Institutional and Program Context

Ball State University is a public Midwestern institution. The Department of Educational Leadership's Doctorate of Education (EdD) operates as a blended program in a cohort model. Students are often full-time practitioners who are balancing full-time jobs and family lives with their graduate education. The typical doctorate path involves students completing their coursework, followed by a traditional dissertation.

The decision was made to develop and implement a peer mentoring program for first-year EdD students in our Educational Leadership department to offer better support for new students, and to ultimately decrease attrition rates. After researching how peer mentoring programs are typically implemented in graduate programs (for example, Erickson & Travick-Jackson, 2006; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Pidgeon et al., 2014) and determining what our peer mentoring program should look like, we began recruiting mentors from a pool of EdD graduates, doctoral candidates, and upper-level students within our EdD program. Mentors were not offered any compensation for participation, aside from the chance to increase their own mentoring skills. Ultimately, ten mentors volunteered their time, and the researchers met with them for a two-hour training session during which the mentors were provided basic communication skills found in mentoring literature and information about the expectations of the peer mentoring program.

Next, mentees were recruited from the first-year EdD cohort. We invited all first-year students in the EdD program to participate. Out of the twelve cohort members, eleven agreed to participate. Because the program was designed for students in a cohort to take the same classes together, we selected an introductory course where all students would be present, introduced the program, and obtained consent for the study.

Both mentors and mentees completed a short, survey about their research interests, current positions, and future aspirations. Based on this information, along with their geographic location, mentors and mentees were paired up and given one another's contact information. Because we had eleven mentees and ten mentors, one mentor opted to work with two mentees.

Aside from initial informational meetings and emails, the peer mentoring program was designed to be left largely to the discretion of the peer mentor/mentee pairs. Due to differing responsibilities, schedules, and geographic locations, we supposed that each pair would likely opt to operate differently. Mentors were expected to have mentoring conversations with their mentees at least once per month in person, by phone, or via web conference. Although mentors were expected to be in regular contact with their mentees, each pair defined what that meant and how they wanted to meet.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research design was a single case study of our peer mentoring program for which we used mixed methods and collected data concurrently. The case study design was appropriate for our research because we sought to understand the complexities of our program in the context of our university, while also exploring the similarities and differences among the experiences of our mentees with what we knew about other peer mentoring programs (Stake, 1995). The oft-cited shortcomings of case study research, which is that the results are not generalizable, were not barriers to our methods. The purpose of our research was to understand the program specific to us in our context, which is a main purpose of a case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

PARTICIPANTS

All eleven mentees, which included nine males and two females, agreed to participate in the study. One male was African American; eight males and two females were Caucasian. All students in the cohort were working full-time in positions including school-based, central office, and state-wide jobs. Research interests and future aspirations varied amongst the students. Table 1 displays general information about the eleven participants. Although mentors' perspectives were not included in this study, we also provided general information about the demographics and research interests of the mentors since this information was used to match mentors and mentees (See Table 2). All of the mentors were Caucasian and five were males and five were females. Mentors held a variety of positions ranging from school and district administrators, to higher education instructor, and corporate executive. As noted for both tables, although we used specific demographic information such as race, job title, and location in order to purposefully match mentors and mentees, the information in Tables 1 and 2 is more general in order to protect participants' identity.

Table 1. Mentee Information

Mentee #	Gender	Current position	Research interests	Future aspirations
Mentee 1	Male	District administrator	Role of school counselors	District administrator; Higher education instructor
Mentee 2	Male	High school principal	School climate and safety	Superintendent
Mentee 3	Male	Elementary school principal	School safety and improving instruction	Superintendent
Mentee 4	Female	*	Professional learning communities	District office position and higher education instructor
Mentee 5	Male	High school principal	School safety and facilities	District office position or higher education instructor
Mentee 6	Male	District director	School start times	
Mentee 7	Female	*		Higher education instructor
Mentee 8	Male	*	Unsure	Building or district administrator, or professor
Mentee 9	Male	High school principal	Literacy	Superintendent
Mentee 10	Male	Middle school principal		Superintendent
Mentee 11	Male	*	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment	School district administration

Note. All data were collected from the mentees at the beginning of the peer mentoring program. Although we collected more specific information regarding demographics and research interest as part of our matching process, the information provided here is general or marked with *, in order to protect participant confidentiality. Blank sections indicate no response.

Table 2. Mentor Information

Mentor #	Gender	Current position	Dissertation topic/ Methods	Future aspirations
Mentor 1	Male	*	Professional development/Mixed Methods	
Mentor 2	Female	*	Literacy/Mixed Methods	Superintendency
Mentor 3	Male	High school principal	School safety/Quantitative	
Mentor 4	Male	High school principal	School safety/Quantitative	District administration
Mentor 5	Male	District administrator	Educational technology/Quantitative	
Mentor 6	Female	*	Mathematics/Quantitative	Higher education
Mentor 7	Female	District administrator	Professional development	
Mentor 8	Female	*	Advanced coursework in high schools	Higher education
Mentor 9	Female	*	Student achievement	District administration or higher education
Mentor 10	Male	District administrator	Student achievement	

Note. All data were collected from the mentors at the beginning of the peer mentoring program. Although we collected more specific information regarding demographics and research interest as part of our matching process, the information provided here is general or marked with *, in order to protect participant confidentiality. Blank sections indicate no response. Mentor # does not match his or her mentee.

Data Collection

Quantitative methods included two anonymous surveys – one at the beginning and one near the end of the same academic year. Both surveys were delivered through the online platform, Qualtrics. We created the survey questions which were designed to elicit information about the mentee's perception of the role of the peer mentor in developing the mentee's academic, psychosocial, and career development, based on our review of literature and the conceptual framework by Yob and Crawford (2012). We estimated the face validity of the survey by considering aspects of peer mentoring programs we sought to address and reviewing whether the questions reflected what we wanted to know. We estimated content validity of the survey by reviewing the range of peer mentoring outcomes we identified in the literature (Babbie, 1990). The survey consisted of the same 13 questions that were asked at the beginning and end of the mentee's first year to ascertain the level of growth, if any, in the different areas of support (see Table 3). Five questions investigated academic concerns, five questions investigated psychosocial concerns, and three questions investigated career concerns. Participants selected one response category on a three-point Likert scale from: 1 (Disagree/Not True); 2 (Somewhat Agree/Somewhat True); and 3 (Disagree/Not True). We compared the data from these two surveys to analyze the difference between mentee perceptions and attitudes prior to and after participating in the peer mentoring program.

Table 3. Pre- and Post-Survey Questions for Mentees in Educational Doctoral (EdD) Peer Mentoring Program

Number	Question
1	I have a clear understanding about what it takes to complete the EdD from coursework through the dissertation defense.
2	I understand the purpose and significance of the comprehensive exam.
3	I understand the requirements and process for the dissertation proposal.
4	I understand the role of my dissertation chair in the EdD process.
5	I understand the importance of having a daily writing habit.
6	I know what BSU supports exist if I face any obstacles with academic concerns.
7	I know what BSU supports exist if I face any obstacles with writing.
8	I feel comfortable asking Educational Leadership faculty questions or discussing concerns related to the EdD.
9	I have confidence in my academic ability to complete my dissertation.
10	I have confidence that I will complete the EdD in 5 years or less.
11	I have a plan for managing my career, writing (academics), and my personal life while completing my dissertation.
12	I want to complete the EdD but am concerned about how to manage my time between my personal life, my work schedule, other outside activities and completing the EdD.
13	I have goals for my career related to the completion of the EdD.

Note. EdD students (mentees) answered the items at the beginning of the peer mentoring program and toward the end of their first academic year based on a three-point Likert scale from 1 to 3 (True; 1=Disagree/Not True; 2=Somewhat Agree/Somewhat; 3=Agree/True).

To collect qualitative data, the first author conducted and audio-recorded individual interviews as well as one focus group interview. The first author gained experience conducting qualitative research and interviewing skills while completing her dissertation. Data collection took place in the spring semester, approximately one semester after the mentees had connected with their mentors. The individual interviews were conducted via web conferencing, using WebEx. The interview protocol consisted of 11 questions. Mentees were asked to recall their experiences thus far in the peer mentoring program, including benefits of being mentored, whether they asked to be matched with a mentor based on demographics and if it they found that beneficial, how mentoring helped them with their academic and career goals, and improvements that could be made in the mentoring program.

The first author invited participants to a focus group that was coordinated with a time and date that they would be on campus to attend their in-person class sessions. Seven of the 11 participants participated in the focus group, which took place in a separate classroom and was audio-recorded. The

focus group protocol consisted of six questions that were about similar concepts, but different from the individual interviews. Whereas the individual interviews sought to gather information about the mentees' individual experiences, the focus group questions were more general. For example, mentees were asked to reflect on the extent to which they felt the mentoring program helped them grow professionally and to consider what new knowledge they gained that they wish they had known at the beginning of the program. As with the interviews, mentees were asked to reflect on benefits and opportunities for improvements to the program. Our intention with including these similar questions was so that we could analyze similarities and differences in the data between individual and group answers. We hoped to probe further into any consistencies or discrepancies during the focus group. However, the first author found that due to the brief window of data collection, most participants who had been interviewed before the focus group did not have additional information to share in the focus group, while others had not participated in the interview by the time of the focus group. As a result, there was not a great opportunity for additional probing questions. In future research, we will allow more time in between the various forms of data collection so that participants have an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, thereby, hopefully allowing for more robust and interesting findings.

We did not employ a sequential design where we interviewed doctoral students after collecting the quantitative data. A sequential design would have provided opportunities for us to investigate some of the discrepancies between quantitative and qualitative data. However, we collected data concurrently in order to gather their perspectives as close to the end of year one as possible. All participants took the pre-survey first but after that, the interviews, focus group, and post-survey may have occurred in different sequences for each participant, depending on individual scheduling needs. After the interviews and focus group session were transcribed, all three authors analyzed and coded the data. Several themes emerged from this process in addition to our findings from the quantitative data, which will be explained first.

Data Analysis

Because the surveys were anonymous, we analyzed them as aggregate data. Additionally, we collected and analyzed focus group data as a whole, rather than by each individual mentee.

Quantitative analysis

Survey data were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Scientists). Due to the small population size (n=11), we ran basic descriptive tests to ascertain frequency. We reported this descriptive data by the number and percentage of participants who responded in each response category for each question. Then, we compared the aggregate responses between the pre- and post- surveys. We reported the difference in the response categories between the pre- and post- surveys (see Table 4).

Table 4. Pre- and Post-Survey Data from Mentees in Educational Doctoral (EdD) Peer Mentoring Program

	Pre-Survey						Post-Survey						Increase/Decrease from Pre-Post					
	Agree		Somewhat Agree		Disagree		Agree		Somewhat Agree		Disagree		Agree		Somewhat Agree		Disagree	
Question	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1	4	36%	6	55%	1	9%	2	18%	8	73%	1	9%	-2	-18%	2	18%	-	-
2	2	18%	8	73%	1	9%	2	18%	7	64%	2	18%	-	-	-1	-9%	1	9%
3	2	18%	4	36%	5	45%	1	9%	4	36%	6	55%	-1	-9%	-	-	1	10%
4	2	18%	4	36%	5	45%	2	18%	5	45%	4	36%	-	-	1	11%	-1	-11%
5	6	55%	5	45%	-	-	4	36%	7	64%	-	-	-2	-19%	2	19%	-	-
6	3	27%	7	64%	1	9%	3	27%	7	64%	1	9%	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	3	27%	5	45%	3	27%	2	18%	7	64%	2	18%	-1	-9%	2	19%	-1	-9%
8	9	82%	2	18%	-	-	10	91%	1	9%	-	-	1	9%	-1	-9%	-	-
9	8	73%	2	18%	1	9%	6	55%	5	45%	-	-	-2	-18%	3	27%	-1	-9%
10	9	82%	1	9%	1	9%	7	64%	4	36%	-	-	-2	-18%	3	27%	-1	-9%
11	5	45%	4	36%	2	18%	4	36%	7	64%	-	-	-1	-9%	3	28%	-2	-18%
12	6	55%	5	45%	-	-	4	36%	4	36%	3	27%	-2	-19%	-1	9%	3	27%
13	10	91%	1	9%	-	-	7	64%	4	36%	-	-	-3	-27%	3	27%	-	-

Note. EdD students (mentees) answered the items at the beginning of the peer mentoring program and toward the end of their first academic year based on a scale from 3 to 1 (3=Agree/True; 2=Somewhat Agree/Somewhat True; 1=Disagree/Not True). Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. Therefore, all totals do not equal 100%. Question numbers coincide with those listed in Table 3.

Qualitative analysis

The focus group and interview recordings were transcribed. We analyzed the qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups using structural coding methods, meaning that we assigned question-based codes to each interview question (Saldaña, 2009). To ensure inter-rater reliability, two of us coded the first interview question individually. We met to discuss similarities and differences in our approach and discussed the different categories to reach common understanding about codes and categories. Based on our conclusions from this meeting, we continued to code the rest of the interviews and focus groups by identifying categories such as "future focus" and "socioemotional support" throughout all the answers for each individual interview question.

For our second round of coding, we reviewed and refined our categories to develop themes. Initial categories and emergent themes were developed into specific statements; for example, "future focus" became "mentees focused on the future when talking to mentors." Statements of a similar nature or theme were combined into overarching statements or themes. After coding each interview and focus group transcript in this fashion, the qualitative data were reviewed and the statements that occurred most often throughout all the data were selected as our primary qualitative themes for this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Mentees experienced an education doctoral peer mentoring program through intentional pairing with mentors who were graduates or current students completing the dissertation requirement of the EdD program at our institution. Mentees met with mentors via phone, web conference, or in-person. Together, they determined discussion topics, which included course content and instructors, short-term and long-term degree completion plans, comprehensive exam and dissertation processes, career goals, and professional or personal challenges or successes.

QUANTITATIVE DATA FINDINGS

We present findings from qualitative and quantitative data concurrently in the following section, but highlight two findings specific to the quantitative data first. Survey data yielded interesting and unexpected results in that, for many of the mentees, their confidence in their abilities to handle the EdD program and their understanding of the EdD program decreased from pre-survey to post-survey (see Table 4). Most questions yielded a decrease in "strongly agree" answers (ranging from -9% to -27%), an increase in "somewhat agree" answers (ranging from 9% to 27%), and even an increase in "disagree" answers (ranging from 0% to 27%). However, two questions yielded results one might expect given that the intent of the peer mentoring program was to support student success. Question 8 ("I feel comfortable asking Educational Leadership faculty questions or discussing concerns related to the EdD.") yielded a slight increase (+9%) in the answer "agree." The one reverse scored question (Question 12: "I want to complete the EdD but am concerned about how to manage my time between my personal life, my work schedule, other outside activities and completing the EdD.") yielded an increase (+27%) in the answer "disagree."

Shifts in perspectives occurred between the pre- and post- surveys in Questions 9 and 10, which asked about the participants' confidence in their abilities to complete the EdD in five years and their confidence to write their dissertation. Agreement with both of these questions decreased by 18% from pre-survey to post-survey, while "somewhat agree" answers increased by 27%. These results were puzzling to us considering that the research shows that peer mentoring programs are beneficial for doctoral students, and that the qualitative interview data largely contradicted the quantitative survey data as noted in the next subsection. This seeming contradiction will be addressed in the Discussion section.

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Findings

Qualitative data were collected from individual interviews and a focus group. As explained earlier, responses to individual interview questions and focus group questions were largely similar. Thus, responses to these are considered in tandem.

Based on the data collected, five themes emerged related to mentee perspectives of peer mentoring in an EdD program: 1) receiving academic advice and program support; 2) focusing on the future; 3) receiving emotional support and work-life balance advice; 4) having an experienced and relatable mentor; and 5) needing more mentoring to derive benefits. These themes are further discussed along with coinciding quantitative data.

Mentees received academic advice and program support from their mentors

One primary theme reported by the mentees was the usefulness of mentors' advice and support related to academics and the doctoral program. Nine of the eleven mentees (81%) mentioned the benefit of academic advice and support during their interviews. Mentors reportedly offered feedback and encouragement to mentees on issues such as "class concerns or homework assignments" or the doctoral program in general. Mentees found this type of support especially useful coming from individuals who "already had prior knowledge" and had experienced the same classes and academic challenges as they were currently undergoing. This is supported by research by Holley and Caldwell (2012) who state that allowing mentees to reach out to peers, in addition to faculty and advisors, about academic concerns creates a more "inclusive community" for doctoral students (p. 250).

This unique mentoring relationship allowed mentees to ask questions about specific professors or classes that they may not have been comfortable asking a professor or advisor. A study by Webb et al. (2009) found that the mentoring relationship lent itself to more candid and honest discussions of classes and the program than an advisor or professor may have been able to offer. The important distinction of a casual peer conversation in comparison to a formal meeting with an advisor can make all the difference in a mentee feeling that they are getting truthful and realistic answers to their questions. As one mentee in our peer mentoring program related, "He [Mentor] can give me a little bit more specific or more insightful information about specific classes that I may not … be able to get from an advisor specifically."

In contrast, two mentees spoke about how the mentoring relationship was not helpful to their academics at this point in their doctoral program. One mentee explained that "with the beginning coursework, I wouldn't say that it's made a difference" due to the simple and self-explanatory nature of the classes. Another mentee stated that the mentoring relationship had not significantly influenced the mentee's academics because the mentee "had the resolve to do the coursework right now" and therefore did not need additional motivation or assistance in that area. These same mentees also expressed concerns that their mentor may not have the right experience and information to help them with academics, with one mentee commenting that, due to the several years between when the mentor and mentee had taken the same classes, "We had different experiences in a lot of ways. So honestly, a lot of the questions I have are really things that I need to talk to my own professors about."

The quantitative findings demonstrated that mentees had the same or decreased understanding of the academic elements of the program, indicating that the mentoring program had not assisted the mentees with academics. For example, agreement with the statement "I have a clear understanding about what it takes to complete the EdD from coursework through the dissertation defense" decreased from 36% (n = 4) in the pre-survey to 18% (n = 2) in the post-survey, while agreement to the statement "I understand the purpose of a dissertation chair" stayed the same at 18% (n =2). This may indicate that while most mentees were receiving academic advice and support, not all of their concerns may have been covered during the mentor conversations.

Mentees focused on their future when talking to mentors

Many of the concerns that mentees brought to the attention of their mentors were related to future-oriented issues. Out of the eleven mentees, five (45%) reported that their mentors provided them insights into their future in the EdD program, and seven mentees (64%) said that they had discussed their future career with their mentor. This coincides with research showing that peer mentorship itself is meant to be focused on preparing the mentee for the future, both in obtaining their degree and succeeding beyond graduate school in their career pursuits (Horowitz & Christopher, 2013). Some of the future concerns that mentees discussed with mentors were academic-focused, particularly issues related to dissertations and comprehensive exams. These conversations often manifested as discussions of "what I [mentee] can expect, maybe towards the end of my coursework and preparing for comps."

Even in their first year of the doctoral program, mentees expressed much concern about choosing dissertation topics, conducting research, writing dissertations, and studying for their comprehensive exams. Mentees turned to mentors with these issues knowing that their mentors had encountered these academic requirements and could advise them on what to expect and how to prepare. One mentee shared that their mentor gave them "some heads-up about things I [mentee] should look out for, some areas where I [mentee] can start preparing so that I [mentee] know what to expect, looking forward."

In addition to academic issues, mentees also talked with their mentors about future career aspirations. Mentors helped mentees explore different career options, or even how the doctorate program may help them in their current positions. A mentee shared that these career-oriented discussions were of value because they "opened my [mentee's] eyes to" career options that were "insightful" and "helpful for me [mentee]." This future-focus helped mentees feel more prepared for what is to come in their doctoral program, as well as in their careers beyond graduation.

However, quantitative data showed that these future-focused discussions may have made mentees more apprehensive of what was to come rather than reassuring them. Mentees' agreement to the statements "I have confidence in my academic ability to complete my dissertation" and "I have confidence that I will complete the EdD in 5 years or less" both decreased between the pre-survey and post-survey (-18%). This may indicate that while the topics related to the future aspects of the program may have been a popular area of discussion for mentors and mentees, the mentees may not have been reassured by their mentors' description of what lies ahead for them in the EdD program. For example, one participant in the mentee focus group commented, "My mentor told me that she cried during her comps, which was both really concerning but also comforting in a way, that we know there's going be some stresses and that everybody is going to experience that and hopefully all live through it." While sharing personal stories of their own EdD experiences, was comforting in some ways to mentees, it may have also made them more apprehensive of what was to come in the future.

Mentees received emotional support and work-life balance advice from mentors

Mentees seemed to struggle with the emotional life stressors associated with graduate school, such a maintaining a healthy balance between school, career, and family. Several of the mentees reported that the EdD program was a challenge for them, with one mentee describing it as "the ongoing war that never ends" and another stating that, "every day is a challenge." Mentors assisted mentees with this burden by offering them advice, emotional support, and empathy. All eleven mentees (100%) mentioned some form of support or comforting presence that their mentors provided them. Peer mentors are often thought of as providers of informal emotional support more than formal academic support (Lowery et al., 2018; Webb et al., 2009), as was the case in this peer mentoring program. While some mentees did benefit from academic advice, it seemed to be the emotional support and social connection that resonated most deeply with mentees during their first year of the EdD program. As one mentee said, "Just knowing she'll be a support as I move through the process is encouraging to me."

It was beneficial for the mentees to have someone who would listen to their concerns, give them advice on how to better manage their time, and assure them that they would make it through the program. Mentees reported receiving advice such as "It can be done and we're getting it done," "Keep an open mind," and "You can do it." This was useful because, according to one mentee, "Having a statement like that stick out in your mind. . . . That's useful." As found in Webb et al.'s (2009) study, having a friend figure to give informal advice and socioemotional support is an invaluable resource for graduate students.

Despite the support they reported in interviews and focus groups, in the post-survey, fewer mentees reported agreement to the statement "I have a plan for managing my career, writing, academics, and my personal life while completing my dissertation" than in the pre-survey, with a decrease of 18%. This may reflect the toll the first year of the EdD program took on mentees, more than the direct effects of the peer mentoring program. As we found in our interviews, many of the mentees were struggling with balancing work, family, and school, and the peer mentoring relationship alone may not have been enough to negate those stressors. While mentors may have been able to listen to and give advice to mentees, the mentoring relationship could not address issues such as one that a mentee faced when dealing with conflicts between work and school schedules: "Some of my really busy times with my current position fall during some of the assignment times … and I think that's one of the biggest struggles."

Mentees appreciated having a mentor who was experienced and relatable

Mentees found it especially valuable to have mentors who had experienced the same doctoral program, taken the same classes, come from similar careers and family situations, and knew first-hand the issues and stressors which the mentees were encountering. Once again, all eleven mentees (100%) referenced their mentors' experiences as one of the most positive aspects of the mentoring program. Knowing that their mentors could relate to their concerns and their stress made the mentees feel more trusting of their advice. Indeed, psychosocial support and the building of community have been found to be some of the most instrumental parts of the peer mentoring relationship. Having the mentees' experiences validated and accepted can go a long way in strengthening the peer mentoring bond (Erikson & Travick-Jackson, 2006). This is one of the prime reasons that mentees and mentors were matched based on similarities in interests and career paths. There is much benefit to be found in pairing peer mentors and mentees, so that they are compatible and can relate to one another as much as possible (Fleck & Mullins, 2012). One mentee reported finding comfort in discovering that "I [mentee] feel like the way I [mentee] approached my first classes was similar to the way she [mentor] approached her classes."

Additionally, seeing that the mentors had succeeded in the program despite school stress and work/life balance concerns made the mentees feel reassured that they too could accomplish what their mentors had accomplished. Mentors often acted as role models for mentees, displaying a future that is both relatable and aspirational. Through the mentoring relationship, mentees were encouraged that, even when the doctoral program feels impossible, they know someone who faced the same struggles and succeeded, and therefore they could complete the program too (Fleck & Mullins, 2012). One mentee, after discovering that her mentor had similar work and family responsibilities, felt reassured that "if she [mentor] can do it, I [mentee] can do it." Another mentee shared that it was his mentor's academic experience that was of value to him: "Always having a person that you [mentee] can talk to besides the people at the university, someone who has field experience, someone who has knowledge of practices and other things that will help you [mentee] as you [mentee] go through the program."

This is an area in which the quantitative and qualitative data appear to agree. In Question 12 of the survey ("I want to complete the EdD but am concerned about how to manage my time between my personal life, my work schedule, other outside activities and completing the EdD"), there was an 18% decrease in answers of "agree" and a 27% increase in answers of "disagree" between the pre- and

post-surveys. These results indicate that after the peer mentoring program, mentees felt less concerned about balancing their responsibilities with the EdD coursework, perhaps due in part to the support and advice of their peer mentors.

Mentees expressed the need for further mentoring in order to derive benefits from the mentoring program

Although mentees reported positive experiences in the peer mentoring program so far, several mentees in both individual interviews and in the focus group expressed that it was too "early in the game" to tell exactly what benefits and/or detriments their mentors would play in their doctoral program experiences. Mentees and mentors were still getting to know each other and discovering what they wanted their mentor/mentee relationship to look like. This is supported by research which finds that the more peer mentors and mentees meet, the larger are the benefits reaped from the mentoring relationship. Mentors and mentees who meet often experience more support and more satisfaction in their relationship (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000). It stands to reason that as mentors and mentees continue their relationship past the first year, mentees will experience more explicit benefits, such as a stronger working relationship and closer psychosocial connection with their mentors.

Three of the eleven mentees (27%) shared in their individual interviews that they were more looking forward to having a mentor to talk to when future concerns arose, such as dissertation and comprehensive exams. They expressed that while they felt confident in their abilities to take classes, they most desired a mentor's input on the activities of the doctoral program in which they had little to no experience. "Perhaps as I go through [the program], that will unfold a little more," one mentee said, "but right now, it's just been, you know, a couple of questions here and there."

The limited benefits of mentoring at this point in the EdD program were reflected in the quantitative findings. On statements oriented towards future program tasks such as "I understand the importance of having a daily writing habit" and "I understand the role of my dissertation chair in EdD process," mentees showed little to no change in agreement between pre- and post-surveys (+/- 0% and -19% respectively). It can be assumed that since these statements concern parts of the EdD path that mentees are not currently working on, the mentoring program is not yet beneficial to them in these areas at this time, and perhaps would need to be addressed later in their EdD program. In the next section, we discuss our findings, beginning with inconsistencies that were discovered between the quantitative and qualitative data followed by our findings in relation to the research questions.

Discussion

We were surprised to find that survey data was not congruous with qualitative data that indicated mentees benefited from the peer mentoring program. However, Wagner et al. (2011) postulate that mixed methods studies with incongruous data highlight the differences between qualitative and quantitative data collection and allow the researchers to capture a more holistic perspective of their research participants than would have been achieved with qualitative or quantitative research alone. When qualitative data conflict with quantitative data, it gives researchers the opportunity to explore the reasons behind the incongruence and present a more nuanced body of research (Wagner et al., 2011). Similarly, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) assert that conflicting data does not represent a flaw in the research but rather a way for researchers to gain a more complex understanding of what is causing the incongruence and adjust the research accordingly. "The goal of mixing is not to search for corroboration but rather to expand one's understanding" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 19).

When investigating the incongruence between the quantitative (survey) and the qualitative (interviews and focus group) data in this study, we looked for clues within the qualitative interviews which may shed light on why mentees appeared to feel less confident about the EdD program in the surveys despite expressing positive views of the mentoring program elsewhere. We found that, aside from the positive statements being made about mentors and the mentoring program, mentees expressed anxiety and stress during their first year of the EdD program. Our best conclusion as to why

quantitative scores showed a negative turn in the post-survey data is that despite the comfort and advice of a peer mentor, mentees experienced stress related to their schooling and gained a clearer picture of the EdD process that lay before them, creating uncertainty and doubt that a peer mentoring relationship could not fully address.

When initiating this study, we set out with the goal of answering three questions. We determined answers to these questions based on our findings.

Question 1: How does the education doctoral peer mentor/mentee relationship develop mentees personally, professionally, and/or academically?

We discovered the ways in which participants believed their relationship with their mentors contributed to their development through qualitative findings. For some mentees, academic development was most important, with mentor/mentee conversations centering around classes, professors, and assignments (Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Webb et al., 2009). For others, professional development took precedence, and conversations between mentor and mentee focused on career possibilities and questions (Horowitz & Christopher, 2013). Yet, the strongest development we saw in our findings was the personal development of the mentees. Mentees shared their hopes, fears, and personal life stories with their mentors, and their mentors, in turn, shared their own stories, offered comfort, and assured them that they were not alone in their experiences through the education doctoral program (Erikson & Travick-Jackson, 2006; Fleck & Mullins, 2012; Lowery et al., 2018). These findings confirmed much of the prior research on the benefits of peer mentoring for doctoral students which found that, above all else, interpersonal psychosocial support is the primary benefit of a peer mentoring program for doctoral students (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Fleck & Mullins, 2012; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Noonan et al., 2007).

Question 2: How does education doctoral peer mentoring help mentees navigate the following domains regarding the EdD program: a) academic, b) emotional/personal, and c) career?

This question ties into the conceptual framework by Yob and Crawford (2012), which states that peer mentoring occurs over two domains: academic and psychosocial. Through analysis of our qualitative and quantitative data, we saw that mentees' experiences did indeed fall across these two domains, as well as the career domain. Mentees addressed academic concerns related to the EdD program, such as current classes and future dissertations. Mentees also reported talking to their mentors about psychosocially-oriented concerns regarding the EdD program, including concerns about balancing work, family, and school and feeling overwhelmed. Lastly, mentees also spoke to their mentors about what the EdD program would mean for their current or future careers. Mentors could share their own career experiences in the education doctoral program with mentees and explore options with them.

Question 3: In what ways do education doctoral mentees' experiences assist the Department of Educational Leadership faculty in continuous program improvement?

By conducting this study and first run of an education doctoral peer mentoring program for our first-year EdD doctoral students, we were able to gather first-hand mentee perspectives on what was helpful and less helpful about our program. Through these discoveries, we conclude that offering peer mentoring for our newest education doctoral students benefitted our program and our students by giving them a knowledgeable senior student/graduate who can offer academic and psychosocial support in their EdD journey. This support did not replace the guidance, instruction, and advice offered by EdD faculty and advisors; rather, the education doctoral peer mentoring program provided an additional layer of encouragement towards degree completion and more understanding of the needs of current EdD students for continuous improvement (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). We will continue to think about how this can inform our program in the future. Based on the data, we concluded

that the mentees who participated in this education doctoral peer mentoring program during their first year in our department benefitted from being a part of a strengthened program.

IMPLICATIONS

Prior research tells us that the mentee-mentor relationship is beneficial for mentees and mentors alike (Christie, 2014; Colley, 2002). We designed this peer mentoring program for EdD students to raise student (mentee) voices and allow for opportunities for aspiring and current school leaders (mentors) to serve as advocates for the EdD students (mentees) in academic, emotional, social, and professional contexts. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017), practitioner-scholarship "represents an opportunity to advance the field of educational leadership, deepen the work of educational leaders in educational organizations, and establish more meaningful connections between theory and practice as it relates to educational research" (p. 20).

Through designing, implementing, and analyzing an EdD peer mentoring program, we recognized the need for each EdD program to consider the needs of their student population. By collecting and analyzing the perceptions of the first-year mentees in our program, we could determine what aspects of the program were beneficial or not beneficial to the mentees. Further research is needed to better understand the differences and similarities in benefits for mentees who begin a peer mentoring program during their first year as a doctoral student and mentees who begin a peer mentoring program after they have completed most of their EdD coursework and are working on their dissertation. Education doctoral programs are unique from other doctoral programs because EdD students are typically practitioner-scholars and work full-time in education-related positions throughout their degree program. Once EdD students begin their dissertations, the implementation of an education doctoral peer mentoring program may be significant to the students' success in completing the program with an additional layer of support from the peer mentor in addition to EdD faculty and advisors. Research on mentoring programs taking place later in doctoral programs appears to be scarce at this point in time, as noted by Lowery et al. (2018), and thus additional research comparing peer mentoring early in the doctoral program and later in the doctoral program may be beneficial to the development of further peer mentoring programs. Additionally, more research regarding the development of sustainable education doctoral peer mentoring programs should be completed to better understand ways to ensure that each mentee receives an appropriate amount of support and guidance.

LIMITATIONS

We did not match individual student data from the pre-survey, post-survey, interview, and focus group results. More specific data may provide for deeper analyses if we had done this. For example, the tracking of participant input in the focus group allows for the analysis of levels of participation and whether participation was balanced. We might also be able to determine whether participants share consistent information and probe how, if, or why their thinking has changed. In future research, we will consider the matching of individual student data from the pre-survey, post-survey, interview, and focus group. By implementing this practice, we may also be able to better account for and explain incongruities between the quantitative and qualitative data.

CONCLUSIONS

Peer mentoring helped mentees navigate through the EdD program by building and maintaining positive relationships with mentors who completed the EdD program at our institution. Each student's academic, emotional, personal, and career support needs are different, and intentional pairing of students with mentors of similar academic goals, research interests, and professional aspirations supports a strong foundation for the mentor to effectively guide and support the mentee. We researched participants' perspectives and understandings of our EdD program to develop a better understanding of students' needs and support options available to successfully complete the EdD program. We discovered in our findings that our program included many important attributes identified in our

conceptual framework (Yob & Crawford, 2012) in that mentors and mentees connected primarily through academic and psychosocial domains.

One of the striking findings we discovered was that there seemed to be a conflict between what mentees reported in their qualitative interviews and what they answered on their quantitative post-surveys. While mentees, for the most part, responded positively to questions about the peer mentoring program and the peer mentors themselves when doing interviews or participating in focus groups, the quantitative data reported that mentees' confidence and knowledge pertaining to the EdD program decreased from their first semester to their second semester in the program.

It is our belief that this seemingly conflicting result reflects the difficulty and stress mentees experienced during the first year of their doctoral program, more so than it reflected a direct effect of the peer mentoring program itself. During the mentee interviews, many reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed by learning how to balance work and family responsibilities with school, as well as reporting frustrations with specific classes, professors, or with academic requirements, all of which with their mentors could do very little to help. Therefore, even though most mentees reported overall satisfaction with and gratefulness for the mentoring program, additional factors outside of the scope of the mentoring program may have still left them feeling less confident about their EdD journey than they felt at the beginning of the program.

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