Near-Peer Mentorship: A Model for Private Music Instruction in an Underserved Community

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Abstract:

The case presented in this study focused on the experiences of students enrolled in a Saturday day music program situated in an underserved community. Students in this community represent a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, and we were interested in whether younger students in the program would benefit from receiving lessons from an older student from the same community. This case study was bound by the shared experiences of the participants who engaged in music teaching and learning through this community music program. Data included the following: student surveys, participant interviews, private lesson and orchestra class observations, and teacher assessments. Overall, near-peer mentorship was beneficial. The majority of participants in this study experienced gains in performance skills. Interviews with the mentors revealed several benefits from tutoring a younger student, including self-analysis of instrument performance, positive feelings gained from helping others, and social benefits. The fifth-grade students who were assigned a mentor reported that they learned instrument-specific skills from their mentor and felt more comfortable and confident playing different songs because instruction was individualized.

Keywords: private music instruction | underserved community | increasing access | near peer

Article:

Increasing access to music instruction for all students regardless of socio-economic background has been an area of need identified by the American String Teachers Association (Benham, 2009) and the National Association for Music Education (2019). Access to string instrument instruction presents a challenge because orchestra programs are currently offered in only 41% of middle schools and 36% of high schools in the United States (Give a Note Foundation, 2017). Because schools located in less affluent areas have fewer resources, the type of opportunities offered to the students in attendance is limited (Costa-Giomi & Chappell, 2007; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006). String programs tend to be offered in more affluent schools (Elpus & Abril, 2011) making access to string instruction inequitable.

Issues with equity extend beyond socio-economic status. The field of education lacks

diversity. According to the National Center for Education, in 2018 nearly 80% of all public school teachers were non- Hispanic White, 9% were Hispanic, 7% were non-Hispanic Black, and 2% were non-Hispanic Asian (McFarland et al., 2018). This is no less true in the string education profession with an even higher rate of string teachers identifying as White (91%) and female (64%) (Smith et al., 2018). Research has shown that string students in the United States are predominantly White (Gillespie & Hamann, 1998); Black and Latino students are underrepresented in school music programs (DeLorenzo, 2012; Elpus & Abril, 2011). However, more recently Smith et al. (2018) found that strings students were more diverse and accurately represented the current demographics in the United States. The increase in diverse students' participation in music is promising, but points to an increasing divide between the backgrounds of students and the teachers who teach them.

Research suggests that having an "own-race" teacher provides academic benefits when students and teachers share the same race/ethnicity because such teachers can serve as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators (Egalite et al., 2015). It is critical for children of color to see music teachers who not only look like them but also represent successful professionals in the field (Bierda & Chait, 2011; Lucas & Robinson, 2003; Quiocho & Rios, 2000). Unfortunately, young music students rarely have the opportunity to study music with a minority teacher, thus lack this type of role model. One way to increase same-race role models in music education may be through utilizing near-peer mentorship among and between students of the same race.

Findings in music education literature related to peer teaching, near-peer teaching, mentoring, and tutoring demonstrate that these models can benefit both mentor and mentee (Alexander & Dorow, 1983; Goodrich, 2007; Johnson, 2011; Scruggs, 2008; Webb, 2015). Peer and near-peer mentoring are similar concepts but differ in that peer-assisted learning typically describes student pairs that are similar in age, experience, and ability, while near peer refers to mentorship pairs where one student is older, has more experience, and can serve as a role model. Researchers have found that access to a near peer can be especially important for music students from underrepresented or marginalized populations (Johnson, 2015, 2017; Shields, 2001). Beyond the benefits of music instruction, providing near-peer role models has positively affected students' social and academic success (Ginsburg-Block et al., 2006).

Near-peer mentorship is not a new concept. This type of mentor–mentee paring has also been referred to as cross-age tutoring. Madsen et al. (1988) investigated cross-age tutoring in a special learners' setting. Fifth-grade students who were identified as behind grade level and extremely disruptive served as tutors for kindergarten students who needed additional support in reading skills. Undergraduate and graduate students viewed the tutoring sessions and described the older tutors as gifted, positive, socially appropriate, and on-task. The kindergarten students who received tutoring from an older peer demonstrated a greater number of learned skills than those without tutors. Mentors and mentees created strong bonds during these tutoring sessions. The benefits of cross-age tutoring have been promoted by Sheldon (2001) because "Student leaders frequently develop a greater respect for others with different levels of skill or aptitude. Students tend to become more understanding and tolerant" (p. 33). More recently, Madsen (2011) investigated the benefits of cross-age reading tutors where music teacher education students served as tutors for fourth- and fifth-grade students in and after-school reading program. Results of this study showed that both tutors and students benefited from the time spent together.

In music learning contexts, Alexander and Dorow (1983) found that peer tutoring had musical benefits for both the tutor and the tutee, especially in instances where the tutor

reinforced the use of desirable musical skills and techniques. Similar findings from Johnson (2011, 2017) indicated that peer-assisted learning led to improved sight reading ability and music theory knowledge in seventh-grade band students. Webb (2015) found that older mentors in a private lesson setting were eager to assist new players, and that they used pedagogical methods that they learned from their teachers. Mentors in this study identified several benefits in their playing and communication (Webb, 2015) and commented that they valued the social connections made with younger players.

Goodrich (2007) examined peer mentoring in a high school jazz band and found that the social aspects of mentorship in this context mirrored mentorship in the jazz community, in which novice players are enculturated by experienced players in the scene. This finding is also present in the work of Green (2002, 2008) and other researchers who investigate informal music learning, in which peers teach and learn from each other in social contexts. Johnson (2015, 2017) cautions that in-service teachers should provide some guidance, training, and structures for both mentors and mentees to increase the likelihood that peer-to-peer mentoring will be beneficial. Goodrich (2018) notes that more research is needed on the topic of peer and near-peer mentoring in urban and underserved environments; we strive to add to this body of literature with the current study.

The *Peck Alumni Leadership* (PAL) program has provided private music instruction through peer mentorship for 3 years, and we were interested in evaluating the effectiveness of this model. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the possible benefits of using near-peer mentorship to provide additional music instruction in an underserved community. Specific research questions included the following: In what ways (if any) is near-peer mentoring beneficial to those giving and receiving music instruction? Does near-peer mentorship impact students' perseverance, leadership, or willingness to engage with others in music-making? Is near-peer mentorship an effective means of improving student success on the instrument they study?

Method

The case presented in this study focuses on the experiences of students enrolled in the PAL program. We argue that this case, and the experiences of the participants in the string program, is bound by their educational experience attending the same elementary school, the exposure to classmates from a wide variety of racial and cultural backgrounds, and the teachers who share musical teaching and learning experiences with these students. This Saturday day lessons program is situated in an underserved community; 99% of students who attend the elementary school qualify for free and reduced lunch. Individual students' families enrolled in the PAL program have recently immigrated to the United States from Cambodia, Vietnam, Senegal, Togo, Jamaica, Honduras, Mexico, and Micronesia. Data sources included the following: student surveys, participant interviews, observations of private lessons and orchestra classes, and teacher assessments. Institutional Review Board's approval was secured from the university as well as the county school system prior to the start of data collection.

Site of Research

This study occurred at Clara J. Peck Elementary School, the host of both the *Lillian Rauch Beginning Strings* (LRBS) and the PAL programs: two programs designed to increase access to

string instruction for underserved students. Clara J. Peck Elementary School supplied five designated mobile units for the purpose of delivering instruction. All group classes and private lessons took place at the elementary school within the community that the students reside.

The LRBS program. The mission of the LRBS program is to increase access to string instruction for underserved students. Established as a community-engaged partnership in 2008, the program is a collaboration among the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, the University of North Carolina Greensboro, and the Clara J. Peck Elementary School. At the time of this study, the program provided string instruction to students in Grades 3 to 5. Student participation was voluntary, and enrollment ranged between 120 and 150 students annually. Students who enrolled in the program received lessons during the school day twice per week in a group setting.

The PAL program. The PAL program was established in 2014. The mission of the PAL program is to provide private lesson instruction to underserved students while simultaneously promoting leadership and service. Graduates of the LRBS program are nominated for inclusion in the PAL program on the basis of work ethic and interest. Students are awarded a full scholarship to receive private lessons through the PAL program in exchange for mentoring a fifth-grade student enrolled in the LRBS program. Using this reciprocal model, both mentors and mentees reside within the same community and experience the same educational setting

Participants

Participants in this study were as follows: a university faculty member ($n = 1$), orchestra teachers ($n = 3$), PAL mentors ($n = 5$), and fifth-grade orchestra students enrolled in the LRBS program ($n = 14$). Names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants in this study

PAL mentors. The PAL mentors were enrolled in the Saturday leadership program and ranged in age from Grades 6 to 12. We selected five of the PAL students who exhibited leadership and strong communication skills to serve as mentor to a fifth-grade student on Saturdays. These five PAL mentors attended an hour-long clinic about mentoring prior to meeting their students. Brief biographical sketches of each PAL mentor are included.

   Terrance was a high school senior enrolled in a local arts magnet school with a strong orchestra program. Without his experience in the LRBS, he would not have been eligible to audition for and attend this arts magnet. Terrance studied the violin and viola through the PAL program for 8 years. He auditioned for and was accepted into an undergraduate Bachelor of Arts in Music program for the Fall 2018 semester. He has mentored fifth graders in the program for the past 4 years on Saturdays. Terrance identifies as bi-racial with strong familial roots in Honduras, where he lived briefly with his aunt. He lives with his grandmother and the primary language spoken at home is English. Terrance also speaks Spanish.

   Clarice was a high school senior attending an area community college. Her school did not offer the opportunity for her to study or play a string instrument. She was extremely driven academically and studied the violin recreationally. Between elementary and high school, she discontinued playing for a few years because she did not have access to instruction. Clarice returned to our Saturday program to give and receive lessons in 2014 and participated in the program from 2014 to 2018.

   Mara was a high school junior who studied violin through the LRBS and the PAL

programs for 8 years. She attended the area arts magnet school, for which she was eligible because of her string experience in the LRBS program. Mara's family is originally from Senegal Africa and speaks Wolof at home. Mara volunteered to help in the Saturday lessons program for 4 years. She plans to study science when she attends university.

Oriel was a freshman in a high school that did not offer an orchestra program. She began her string education in the LRBS program during the third grade. She demonstrated a strong work ethic and interest in learning to play the violin and was awarded a special violin for her use by the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra. She attended a middle school that offered orchestra as a class and switched to viola to help balance the ensemble. She has studied violin and viola for a total of 8 years. Oriel identifies as African American.

Maurice was in the seventh grade and attended a middle school with an orchestra in which he participated. Maurice played both the violin and the viola but considered his primary instrument the viola. During his elementary school experience, he struggled behaviorally and rarely complied with teacher instructions. After attending the Saturday lessons program under the tutelage of Terrance, he became a strong leader in both the Saturday program and in his orchestra class at school. His teachers attribute his change in attitude to the influence of his PAL mentor, Terrance. Since meeting Terrance, he has consistently attended the Saturday lessons program and has studied the violin and viola for 5 years. Maurice began mentoring a fifth grader for the first time this spring. His parents are from Jamaica and his family identifies as Black and Jamaican. Their primary language in the home is a Jamaican dialect of English called Patois.

Fifth-grade students. A total of 14 students were enrolled in the fifth-grade orchestra at the time of this study, seven females and seven males. Students in this class self-identified as Hispanic (four), Asian (two), African American (three), White (one), and Pacific Islander (one). All 14 students agreed to participate in the study during school. Five of these students consistently attended the Saturday lessons program and were mentored by an older student.

Judy studied the violin for 3 years in the LRBS program. Prior to the start of our study, she seemed shy and quiet during orchestra class. She rarely spoke or volunteered in class and would give up when tasks became difficult. She identified as Mexican and her family speaks Spanish in the home.

José studied the violin for 2 years in the LRBS program. José was incredibly shy in class, but he loved the violin and was conscientious and focused. There was room for improvement on his technical skills. He needed to learn to hold the violin all the way on his shoulder. He rarely spoke or volunteered in class. He identified as Mexican and his family speaks Spanish in the home.

Sarrah studied the violin for 3 years in the LRBS program. She tended to be a bit self-conscious of her skill level but enjoyed collaborating with her peers. She regularly volunteered and was willing to answer teacher questions. Sarrah identified as Caucasian and English is the primary language spoken in the home.

Nella studied the violin for 3 years in the LRBS program. She was not the first member of her family to enroll in the lessons program. Her older brother also was a member of the LRBS program. Nella displayed some proficiency on the instrument and has a lot of potential. However, she doubted her own ability to perform so was reluctant to volunteer in class. She was hesitant to take on leadership roles. Nella identifies as Micronesian.

Leo was very energetic, talkative, enthusiastic, and kind to his peers, regularly offering words of support. Like Nella, he also has siblings and cousins enrolled in both the LRBS and the

PAL programs. He studied the violin in the LRBS program then switched to cello at the beginning of fifth grade. He identifies as Cambodian and his family speaks Khmer in the home.

Data Collection

Data included student surveys of the fifth-grade students enrolled in the string program, interviews of fifth-grade students and their mentors, observations of lessons and group classes, as well as teacher assessments (see the appendix for the survey and interview questions). Fifth-grade students were surveyed at the beginning and end of the project so that comparisons could be made prior to and follow the near-peer mentorship experience. PAL mentors ($n = 5$) and LRBS fifth-grade students ($n = 5$), who attended the Saturday lesson program, were interviewed. Interviews occurred individually at the conclusion of the semester.

Observations of private lessons and orchestra classes. PAL mentor sessions and four LRBS group classes were video-recorded so that we could observe instances of leadership, perseverance, and collaboration. We defined these behaviors so that they were observable. Perseverance was measured by the amount of time students remained on task and attempted an activity before giving up. Leadership was measured by observing students volunteer to model, help others, and facilitate discussion among groups. Willingness to collaborate was observed each time students were given the option to choose to work alone or with others.

Teacher assessments. The orchestra teachers were asked to assess the fifth-grade students' perseverance, leadership, willingness to collaborate, and performance skills prior to and following the lessons program using a rating scale of 1 to 5, anchors of 1 = *not observed* to 5 = *consistently demonstrated*. Performance assessments were completed at the end of each semester and covered 20 technical and five musical skills (see the appendix), which were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not demonstrated*, 2 = *demonstrated sometimes*, 3 = *demonstrated frequently*, 4 = *demonstrated consistently*). These performance assessments were recorded for later comparison of gain scores. In addition, teachers completed a biographical sketch for each of the fifth grade students describing the teachers' perceptions of their progress in class including their leadership, perseverance, and collaboration skills.

Procedure

Fifth-grade students and PAL mentors were invited to participate in the study through a letter sent home that outlined the purpose of the research. Parental consent was acquired from all participants prior to data collection. Fifth-grade students were invited to participate in the Saturday PAL mentorship program and seven students chose to attend, five of whom attended regularly. The Saturday lessons program occurred in the spring semester and data were collected across six near-peer lessons.

Surveys were administered to the fifth-grade orchestra students prior to and following the PAL mentorship program. Students were provided the surveys as a group at the beginning of their orchestra class. Students were informed that the researchers were interested in their feelings regarding orchestra and to answer the survey honestly.

To observe perseverance, leadership, and willingness to collaborate, we provided students with four 10-min problem-solving activities. The orchestra teachers presented the

students with a musical goal and gave them 10 min to work toward that goal without teachers' assistance. Students were permitted to choose to work alone or in groups. They were also allowed to choose with whom they would work. Video recordings were made of these four sessions for observational analysis.

Table 1. Fifth-Grade Student Survey Gain Scores From Pre to Post Test.

	Interest		Perseverance		Leadership		Collaboration	
Participant	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
P1	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	0	0
P2[a]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
P3	0	0	-2	-1	0	1	0	-1
P4[a]	0	0	1	-1	0	0	0	0
P5[a]	1	1	-1	0	0	0	1	0
P6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
P7	-1	1	1	0	0	2	4	0
P8	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	1
P9[a]	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	1
P10	1	0	0	0	-1	0	0	1
P11	1	0	-1	0	0	0	1	0
P12	0	0	0	-2	0	-1	1	0
P13[a]	1	0	0	0	3	0	-1	0
P14[a]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Q1: Do you like playing your instrument?
Q2: How excited are you when you get to come to orchestra?
Q3: When something is difficult for you in orchestra class, do you keep trying?
Q4: When something is difficult for you in orchestra, how many times are you willing to try to get it right?
Q5: Do you volunteer to play for the class?
Q6: Do you follow your teacher's instructions?
Q7: Do you like working with a partner in class to learn your music?
Q8: Do you enjoy helping others?
[a] Students who received mentorship from a near peer.

Results

Data Analysis

We collected pre- and post-test data from student surveys, teacher performance assessments, and teacher assessments of leadership, perseverance, and collaboration. Pre and post-test data were compared for each student to produce gain scores in these areas. Data are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Saldaña (2016) notes that "qualitative analysis calculates meaning" (p. 10), and the primary work in data analysis is noting patterns (and deviations) that coalesce into emergent, global themes. Student interviews were transcribed and analyzed for content through manual coding using in vivo quotes to accurately represent the voices of our participants (Saldaña, 2016). Salient quotes were highlighted, and recurrent ideas expressed by participants were circled. Preliminary codes were determined collaboratively by the researchers, resolving any differences in interpretations. Using the preliminary codes, the data were analyzed using a "splitter" approach, wherein the interviews were analyzed line by line. Recurrent patterns were then categorized to identify emergent themes.

The video recordings were reviewed by all members of the research team independently coding instances of leadership (volunteering information, helping others, modeling), perseverance (how long students attempted a task), and collaboration (whether students chose to work in a group or alone). Each researcher made a list of recurrent behaviors or changes in individual student behaviors. We then met and discussed themes that occurred across group classes and lesson interactions.

Table 2. Gain Scores for Teacher Ratings of Performance, Perseverance, Leadership, and Collaboration

Participant	Performance	Perseverance	Leadership	Collaboration
P1	2	-1	-1	0
P2[a]	18	1	0	0
P3	-1	1	0	0
P4[a]	5	-2	0	1
P5[a]	4	1	0	1
P6	8	0	-1	0
P7	22	-2	-3	-3
P8	N/A	-1	-2	1
P9[a]	3	0	0	1
P10	11	0	0	-1

P11	16	-1	-2	1
P12	0	0	1	0
P13[a]	21	1	0	0
P14	-5	0	0	0

Note. N/A: data not available.
[a] Students who received mentorship from a near peer.

In what ways (if any) is near-peer mentoring beneficial to those giving and receiving music instruction?

PAL mentors. Based on the performance assessments, student surveys, and interviews, near-peer mentorship seemed beneficial. During their interviews, PAL mentors commented on several benefits from working with a fifth-grade student, including self-analysis of their own playing through mentorship, positive feelings gained from helping others, and social benefits. PAL mentors learned about their own strengths and areas for growth in musicianship by analyzing their students' needs. For example, Terrance reported that mentoring ". . . helps me to identify my own problems, because if I can teach someone else how to deal with their problems, it kind of gives me the knowledge I need to deal with my own problems." For Mara, the act of mentoring transformed how she approached her own violin lessons, saying, ". . . one of the big ways that I've changed is, like when I go to my own lessons and I can take what I've been teaching them [the fifth graders] and how they react to it to use in my own lessons." All five of the PAL mentors reported this type of self-analysis and application of mentoring to their own learning.

Helping the fifth-grade students make progress on their violins was also a benefit to the PAL mentors. Oriel reported feeling ". . . proud of her [the fifth-grade student] that she's actually able to work on her weak spots." For Mara, helping her student was a way that ". . . I can give back to the community and people that have already helped me so much, and it's everything to me."

All PAL mentors reported social benefits from working with a fifth-grade student. Maurice learned how to be a role model by ". . . demonstrating [to] the fifth graders how to look when they're growing up." Oriel learned that ". . . I like being a leader . . . I enjoy having a leadership role." Terrance, a long-time member of the program, said that mentoring ". . . helps me get to know people around better," and Mara commented on the social growth of the entire program through the mentorship model: ". . . I saw them . . . get to know me better, that maybe we could become friends, and that they wouldn't lose touch no matter how old they got." Clarice's social growth through mentorship revolved around her goal of becoming a pediatrician despite her very quiet and introverted nature: "It has helped me . . . get out of my comfort zone a bit because I'm more introverted and . . . kind of say to myself, 'I do like helping people.'" Clarice also noted improved communication skills due to mentoring: ". . . having to be more patient and more understanding . . . being more thorough when explaining things . . . I hope that can translate to my real life . . . hopefully it'll be beneficial in real life in that way."

Fifth-grade students. The fifth-grade students who attended Saturday PAL mentorship sessions reported that having a mentor helped them acquire instrument-specific skills and made them more comfortable and confident playing different songs because instruction was individualized. Four of the five students reported that they preferred the Saturday lessons over orchestra class, citing reasons such as: "in orchestra class I always learned it but, but it was different because they didn't go over the stuff that I messed up on." The mentors were able to assist them in their personal learning by adapting instruction for each student's individual needs: "Because there's less people and sometimes like it goes like ehh, whatever, like we don't get that much through in orchestra (meaning, play through the entire song) and, and in the lessons sometimes we do get through a bunch of stuff." Students liked that the private lessons could go at the pace they needed. Two of the students also liked that the lessons were quieter and more focused than the group environment at school: "It's easier for me to focus than having a whole group of kids around me that are different, sometimes doing different things."

Table 3. Mentor and Mentee Teacher Assessment Gain Scores.

Mentor	Performance	Perseverance	Leadership	Collaboration
PAL–Terrence	-17	0	0	0
PAL–Mara	1	0	0	0
PAL–Clarice	7	1	1	0
PAL–Oriel	-1	1	1	0
PAL–Maurice	2	0	0	0
LRBS–Leo	18	1	0	0
LRBS–Nella	5	-2	0	1
LRBS–Sarrah	4	1	0	1
LRBS–Judy	3	0	0	1
LRBS–José	21	1	0	0

Note. PAL = Peck Alumni Leadership; LRBS = Lillian Rauch Beginning Strings.

Does Near-Peer Mentorship Affect Students' Perseverance, Leadership, of Willingness to Engage With Others in Music-Making?

Student perseverance was measured through observation, teacher assessment, and student surveys. Observations of lessons and group work showed that students did not give up and continued to work throughout the lessons and orchestra classes. There were no observable moments when students stopped trying. Student surveys showed that the majority of students perceived no change in their perseverance skills throughout this project (see Table 1). Teacher assessments showed that five of the 10 students involved in the mentor–mentee pairings

demonstrated increases in perseverance skills (see Table 3).

Changes in leadership were observed throughout this project. When fifth-grade students were initially given the opportunity to work in student groups, various leaders emerged within each group. Across the four recorded group lessons, students who attended the Saturday program became more engaged and offered suggestions to their classmates that they had learned from their mentor. However, student's self-assessment of their willingness to volunteer and follow teacher instructions showed no change. Similarly, teacher assessments showed little to no change for leadership skills in fifth-grade students based on numeric data (see Tables 1 and 2). The student biographical sketches submitted by the teachers included reflections that Sarrah in particular had grown as a leader through her participation in the PAL program.

Willingness to engage with others in music making was observed by the researchers in the LRBS group lessons, by the LRBS teachers, and by the LRBS students. At the beginning of the project, some fifth-grade students chose to work by themselves, and others within groups. Toward the end of the project, all fifth-grade students chose to work in a group. Four students reported gains in their willingness to work with others and their desire to help others learn music. Teacher assessments showed that five students were more willing to collaborate with others at the end of the project.

Is Near-Peer Mentorship an Effective Means of Improving Student Success on the Instrument They Study?

The majority of participants in this study showed improvement on their instrument, both students who attended the PAL mentorship program on Saturday and those who did not. Performance assessment data (see Table 3) show that three of the five mentors made gains in their technical proficiency and musicianship skills, and all of the fifthgrade students who attended PAL mentorship sessions showed positive gains in these areas. In looking at the data, it is difficult to know whether these scores accurately represent improvement because the technical difficulty of the solo pieces performed in the assessment videos changed from pre to post test. As technical requirements increased, proficiency ratings decreased.

Discussion

Results of this study show that near-peer mentorship may be an effective model for private lesson instruction in an underserved community. Private lesson instruction is expensive and not available to all students. Offering near-peer mentorship is one possible way to increase student success playing string instruments. While the results of this study are inconclusive concerning the effectiveness of the near-peer teaching on performance skills, students overall experienced positive gains in performance ability and social skills.

There were a number of positive social outcomes identified during the study. The LRBS students who attended the PAL Mentorship Saturday program all reside within the same community. Many PAL mentors have participated in the string program for more than 8 years and can serve, as Maurice noted, as role models for the LRBS students. The community of practice that has been established demonstrates a sustained history of practice, where LRBS students can become PAL mentors, and in the case of students like Terrence, can realistically find pathways into university music programs. Furthermore, the PAL Mentorship program provides a safe space for all students to study music, make friends, and explore their potential as

musicians, leaders, and community members. Students in the program frequently refer to their peers and teachers as their "orchestra family." As Mara stated, learning and growing within this community gave her hope that students ". . . could become friends, and that they wouldn't lose touch no matter how old they got." The mentors in this study felt that mentoring a young student helped them self-assess, communicate with others, and give back to their community.

The group musical problem-solving activities done in the LRBS orchestra class had a profound impact on the LRBS students. The students who attended the PAL Mentorship program on Saturdays displayed leadership, perseverance, and collaboration, but so did students who could not, for whatever reason, come to PAL. In these group musical problem-solving activities, leadership roles were shared, traded, and negotiated. Collaboration took on many forms, with some students learning how to be more deferential in their collaboration and others being empowered to collaborate. While coding videos, the researchers noted that the students were on-task, focused, and used higher-order thinking to try and solve their problem: they did not give up. The group musical problem-solving activities provided an opportunity for LRBS students to demonstrate perseverance, leadership, and collaboration while researchers measured these traits in a real-world learning situation. Students enjoyed this opportunity and began to request more time to work together. One of the culminating activities in the class was a fifth-grade LRBS student teaching his orchestra friends a new song that he had learned from his mentor in the Saturday program. Future research in this area could examine interactions between perseverance, leadership, and collaboration in group musical problem solving, and student negotiation of leadership roles in group musical problem-solving activities as a function of near-peer mentoring.

This study was intended as a descriptive exploration of near-peer mentorship as a possible model for private lesson instruction in an underserved community. Increasing access to music instruction for all students should be of primary concern. The students in this study were given access to both group and private instruction. While increases in collaboration and performance skills were observed, these increases were small. Minimal changes in perseverance or leadership were reported or observed. The teachers who assessed the students' performance and social skills were aware of which students participated in the Saturday lessons program potentially biasing their perceptions of student growth. Nonetheless, students experienced a positive learning environment and many of these students elect to participate in this Saturday program year after year. The social bonds developed between the students may be the most important aspect of this research. Further studies should investigate possible benefits of near-peer mentorship as a means to increase access to music instruction.

Appendix

Fifth-Grade Survey

Students were instructed to circle the emoji that best represented their feelings regarding each of the following statements on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5:

1. Do you like playing your instrument?
2. How excited are you when you get to come to orchestra?
3. When something is difficult for you in orchestra class, do you keep trying?
4. When something is difficult for you in orchestra, how many times are you willing to try

to get it right?
5. Do you volunteer to play for the class?
6. Do you follow your teacher's instructions?
7. Do you like working with a partner in class to learn your music?
8. Do you enjoy helping others learn their music?

Fifth-Grade Interviews

1. Describe your mentor. What were they like?
2. Was it helpful to have a mentor? In what ways? What did they teach you?
3. Compare lessons with your mentor to orchestra class? Which was more helpful? Did you like one or the other more?
4. What was your favorite part of learning a string instrument?
5. If you had the opportunity, would you continue playing and learning your string instrument? Why or why not?

Mentor Interviews

1. Was mentoring a fifth grader beneficial to you? If so, in what ways?
2. Do you think your fifth graders benefited from your mentorship? If so, in what ways?
3. What type of growth did you see in your student?
4. Did your student experience any challenges?
5. Have you grown or changed through helping a fifth grader? In what ways?

Teacher Assessments

Violin	Cello
Instrument positon	
Violin placement on shoulder	Heel of the neck in relation to heart
Feet placement	Seated position
Angle of head	Lower bouts knee level
Ability to hold violin without hands	C-peg behind left ear
Violin position parallel to the floor	Knees parallel to the floor
Bow hold	
Flexible thumb	Flexible thumb
1.5 Knuckles deep	1.5 Knuckles deep
Round pinky on top of bow	Round pinky one pad deep

Pronation	Slight pronation
Bow motion	
Bowing parallel to bridge	Bowing parallel to bridge
Flexible wrist	Flexible wrist
Right elbow opens and closes	Ball and socket + elbow
Even speed and weight	Even speed and weight
Left hand frame	
Straight wrist	Straight wrist
Boxed fingers	Boxed finger
Angle of finger placement	Angle of finger placement
Loose thumb	Thumb behind second finger
Left hand finger hover	Left hand finger hover
Escape hatch	C-shape
Musical skills	
Steady beat	
Rhythm	
Pitch/intonation	
Tone	
Articulation	

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