Putting the Relationship Back in Youth Mentoring Relationships

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Series of Studies

Early Work on Mentoring Relationships

- Highly successful: 24 mentor-youth pairs

- Early Ending: 20 mentors, 11 youth

Understanding the Mentoring Process

- Mixed methods

- 67 matches – mentors, youth, & caregivers

- Multiple timepoints – up to 2 yrs post match

STAR (with Keller)

- Mixed methods

- Quant: 358 matches

- Qual: 36 matches

- Mentors, caregivers, & program staff

A Robust Finding

Among children and adolescents at risk for developing psychological difficulties, one **good relationship** with an adult, not necessarily a parent, is associated with **greater psychological health**.

"Closing the mentoring gap"

SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW. BECOME A MENTOR.

It doesn't take special skills to mentor a young person—just a willingness to listen, offer encouragement, and share what you've learned about life. Mentoring programs in your community need more volunteers.

Visit MENTORING.org

Harvard School of Public Health • MENTOR • MetLife Foundation

5TH ANNIVERSARY
NATIONAL
MENTORING MONTH
JANUARY 2006

Relationships are "easy"

Improvements in:

- Multiple developmental domains (i.e., social , emotional cognitive, academic)
- Attitudes , behaviors, performance

Can make things better and prevent them from getting worse

Broad and flexible approach

Across ages

Multiple formats – one-to-one, group, peer
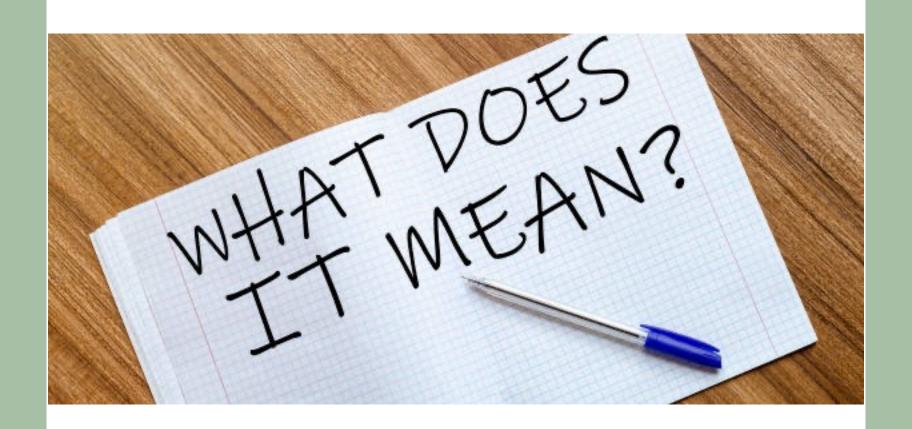
Mentoring Does Not Work

Or Not very Well, at Least

Effect sizes modest

Have not budged, despite 2 decades of research and emphasis on improved progam practices

Targeted programs show greater promise

Jean Rhodes (2020) *Older and Wiser*

Two Factors

Outcomes

Relationships

Good Outcomes

To love and work

-Freud

Lower rates of antisocial behavior

- Rutter

Overall social and educational competency

- Garmezy, Masten

Mentoring is a *"broad-based intervention that is believed to improve youth's lives by addressing the specific and differing needs of participating youth across a wide range of areas"* (Herrera et al., 2013)

Different Types of Mentoring Relationships: A Bilateral Approach

	Mentoring Relationship as an End	Mentoring Relationship as Means to an End	
Type	**Supportive**	**Problem-Focused**	**Transitional**
Length	Often 1 year or more	Less than 1 year	Dictated by transition
Goals	Normative developmental achievements & milestones	Reductions in specific problems; improved health for specific groups	Successful transitions for specific groups
Change Mechanisms	Safe, supportive, nurturing relationship	Shift in risk/protective factors specific to problem or germane to group	Shift in risk/protective factors specific to group's transition

(Cavell, Spencer, & McQuillin, 2021)

Mentoring Relationships as a Means to an End

- Delivery of mental health interventions – Rhodes, McQuillan, and colleagues
- Lunch Buddies mentoring – Cavell, Elledge, and colleagues

Mentoring Relationships as an End

Power of Relationships

Hard-wired to connect
Ravages of loneliness &
    social isolation
Health promoting power
    of social connections
ACEs and PCEs
    safe, stable, nurturing
    relationships (SSNRs)

Ways We can We Think about Relationships

Independent Self

Dominant in Western Psychology

Strong sense of self to be in healthy relationships

Relationships important for good development

Self-in-Relation

Rooted in feminist theory

Self formed in relationship with others

Relationships as a mechanism for development

Origin Stories

Kimmerer (2013) *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Centering Relationships – *For Real*

- Goal – promotion of positive youth development through safe, supportive, nurturing relationships

- Build a strong science to support the promotion of these kinds of relationships

  - Focus on relational processes and what mentors *do*

  - Attend to context

  - Address the mentoring system

Safe

Requires mentors who are:

- Committed

- Dependable

- Culturally aware and skilled

Committed

"I'll have to give [the mentor] a lot of the credit on that, that . . . she sort of kept it going . . . I know that there have been times when [the youth] has called or texted her, but . . . . the one who sorta keeps coming back, and especially after things have been . . . busy."
                              - a caregiver

"I foresee her getting another serious relationship when she gets older or whatever, but until she's sort of too busy to hang out, but I don't ever see like not inviting her to come for Christmas Eve or not wanting to be at an important event for her."   - a mentor

"I wasn't sure 'cause I just got married as well, and so I wasn't sure how much time I'm gonna have with doing school and doing work and being married and all this stuff . . . I said, "You know, what? I'll carve out some time for him because . . . he looks up to me and . . . wants to get together with me so much." - a YIM

Dependable

"If I said I was gonna be there at 10:30, I was there at 10:30. If I said I was gonna call him, I called him. I always followed through."

- a mentor

"When [my mentor] says something, he always does it."

- a youth

Prevent early closures

Keep promises made to youth

Facilitate good closure when relationships do end

"I don't think he likes me no more… Because he left without saying, he just left without calling." - a youth

"discouraged me from wanting to put him in a situation again not saying that another person would do the same thing." - a parent)

Spencer et al., 2017

Cultural Humility

Cultural awareness

Knowledge of self in relation to others

Acknowledgement and challenging of interpersonal and structural barriers

Skills to navigate these in mentoring relationship in helpful and not harmful way

Social Justice & Race Equity Training for mentors called ***Culturally Smart Relationship Training*** - **Sanchez and colleagues**

Supportive & Nurturing

"A child needs the enduring, irrational involvement of *one or more* adults in *care* of and in *joint activity* with that child. In short, somebody has to be *crazy about that kid*"

Urie Bronfenbrenner

Nurturing Processes

- Authenticity
- Positive regard
- Social support
- Collaboration
- Empathy

Authenticity

"He had to be real with me, you know. I can't get close to nobody without them being real with me …. And without you being real with me, you can't be close with me …. He brought it to me real, so I was like, okay."

- a mentee

"when you're a counselor …you've got this wall. But with her, it's just like… I think of her as my little sister, you know. … I guess cause I let myself be vulnerable and you know, be emotional."

- a mentor

Spencer, 2006

"He's a real good kid. And he has some other issues with, you know, family issues and school issues, that still ....concern me a lot. But I know just who he is...."

- a mentor

she is...a bright light. She really is, I mean,...she's got a good heart. She knows right and wrong. Although she doesn't always follow through. But I mean, heck, who didn't do that when they were a teenager, you know? .... I think that she definitely does like to push the envelope, test the limits, ... which I think goes along with being a teenager... .but as far as like .... her core - like I think everybody has a core, you know?   - a mentor

Spencer, 2006

Positive Regard

Social Support

Emotional

Instrumental

Companionship

I do still have like, attitude problems at school, but it's not as bad. Like I can get an attitude, and...then calm down and get back to my work. .... I'm kinda learning to like, let it go. It's like, it's little, it's not a big thing. [My mentor's] helping me on that. Like she's just tells me, "You know, don't get mad, just let it go. You know, don't let any little thing mess up your day, just keep going." You know? So I'm...practicing on that.

- a youth

Fun

Companionship support

Collaborative

Development through interactions with more skilled partners
- Zone of proximal development (Vygotsky)
- Guided participation (Rogoff)

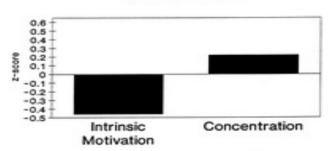Youth centered –cultivation of youth interest and initiative

Steering youth toward new pathways

"I have this closet in my room, a big one….I want to have it like, locked, so I have to be locked in to do homework. Cause that way I have to. You know what I mean, I can't get up to watch TV or something. Cause that way, I'm in my room with all my books and stuff, just sitting there like, it's worse than just doing my work. Since I can't do anything else. … And that's why when I go over to Wolfgang's house, I have to do my work. I go there to do it. So it's not like my own home, so I can't just be like, I'm in the middle of my work and like, oh, Wolfgang, I'm just going to do this now. I can't do that … that's why it helps me to do my work there."
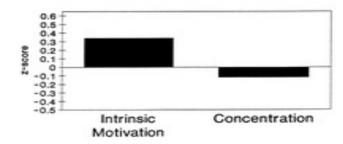
- a youth

Supporting Youth Initiative

"So last year for example we worked for about four weeks on a project that he had to do for school on the Panama Canal. And…. I took him to the library, we got the books …And … we built this …. Panama Canal. … And he was great about it …. he did all the work himself, with just with my guidance and supervision…. he …. had to practice his speech in front of the whole… group of parents and teachers and we were working on it really hard and I just made him repeat it, repeat it. …. And he did really well. …. I think …. he did one of the best"
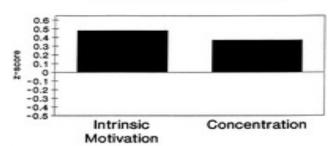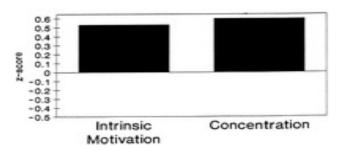
- a mentor

Class Experience

Experience During Sports

Experience With Friends

Experience During Arts, Hobbies, and Organizations

(Larson, 2000)

Empathy

Two Parts

- Perspective taking

  "I think the biggest thing is... adjusting to where she's from and like what she grew up in and what she's ... the atmosphere she has had versus what I had when I was a teenager. Trying to see it through her [eyes]." - a mentor

- Adaptability

  "I might have some expectations but I can't really say that it will happen like I want. So, I'm just waiting to see what's going to happen and kind of adapt to what I need to for [my mentee]." - a mentor

Spencer et al., 2020

Empathy in Action

"There was a time where, you know, if I'd be a few minutes late, he would start to freak. It was like 'oh my gosh he's late.' And for me, I just didn't think about it, oh, I'm just running late, you know, I'll be there. But I didn't realize that this was creating kind of a freak out and he was able to say, 'you know, Stewart, it kind of makes me freak out when you're late.' And I was, 'all right. I appreciate you telling me that.' So I think he learned to trust me a little more and realize that I can hear what he has to say …. in terms of running late."

- a mentor

Empathy is a skill

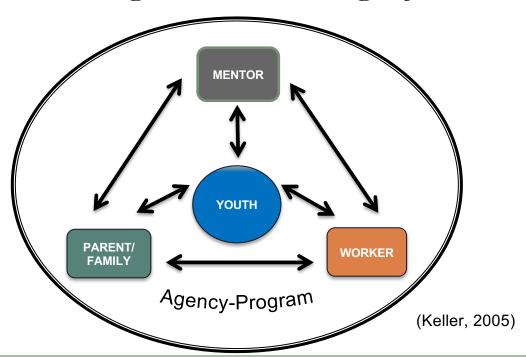Can be improved through learning and practice

Mutually Influencing Processes

- Positive emotional connections can
  - Enhance feelings of trust
  - Promote youth's openness to adult's influence, support and guidance

- Receiving effective support and guidance can
  - Deepen emotional connection
  - Build trust

- Engaging in shared activities can
  - Enhance emotional well-being
  - Contribute to increased self-confidence, willingness to take risks

Additional Nurturing Processes

Attunement (Pryce)
Presence approach (Brady & Dolan)

Addressing the Mentoring System

(Keller, 2005)

Conclusions

We've come a long way but we still have a long way to go

Need to build a true science of mentoring *relationships*
- Key features of different types of mentoring relationships
- What mentors *do*
- How to select and train the best mentors
- How to structure programs to best support mentors in their specified roles – match program support to mentoring relationship type

*"In order to be a mentor, and an effective one, **one must care**. You don't have to know how many square miles are in Idaho, you don't need to know what is the chemical makeup of chemistry, or of blood and water. **Know what you know** and **care about the person**, **care about what you know** and **care about the person you're sharing with**."*   - Maya Angelou

Thank you!

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