

Research Quarterly

Issue No. 2

Spring 2010



The Australian Youth Mentoring Network: a national hub for youth mentoring research, tools and resources



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Welcome to the Spring 2010 Edition

Welcome to the spring edition the Research Quarterly. Each quarter, we aim to provide you with a summary of recent research articles on youth mentoring as well as provide a more detailed article which looks at research in a particular area of youth mentoring.

This month, we look at after school programs and whether they improve personal and social skills, the role of the mentor-mentee bond and the mentee's perception of their relationship and review three recent trials of school based mentoring. .

We spotlight the impact of youth mentoring programs on young people who are in the foster care system and compare three articles in this area.

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Newsletter compiled by Jennifer Hsu on behalf of the Youth Mentoring Network 2010.

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Review of Three Recent Randomised Trials of School-Based Mentoring

Wheeler, Marc E, Thomas E Keller and David DuBois 2010. "Review of Three Recent Randomised Trials of School-Based Mentoring". *Social Policy Report* 24 (8): 1-21

"Wheeler, Keller and DuBois indicate that SBM programs have a small but significant impact on school based success, but it is more likely that such programs will affect the "more proximal behaviours and beliefs that keep students engaged in school and that are likely to foster learning"

School based mentoring (SBM) programs are constantly asked by funders, both government and private to provide assessments of the program's effectiveness. Research emerging from this area varies across the spectrum and it is often difficult to provide a definitive answer. Since 2007, the results of three large random evaluations of school-based mentoring programs in the US have become available and the article here by Wheeler, Keller and Dubois provides a summary and an integrated analysis of the three different results. The purpose of such synthesis is to offer a stronger foundation for policy and decision makers with regards to SBM's development and funding.

There are approximately 4700 programs in the US national database on mentoring programs and 1 in 4 are SBM. SBM is structured and takes place in school, often with emphasis on improving academic achievements.



The three large-scale randomised controlled trials (RCT) have provided differing conclusions. The Big Brothers Big Sisters of America program showed that mentees had improved across a number of indicators including academic performance as a result of participating in the program for the duration of a year. The results of the Communities in Schools of San Antonio, a multi-component program were shown to have limited value in general. But the program may be most useful to elementary school boys and high school girls.

The third survey of the US Department of Education's Student Mentoring Program concluded that mentoring did not lead to statistically significant improvements in pro-social and problem behaviour or academic achievement for the participating youth. With the publication of the research results pertaining to US Department of Education's Student Mentoring Program, it has provided the Obama Administration the justification to eliminate funding to SBM programs. Thus, SBM programs in the US would appear to be at a cross-road.

How do we interpret such varied outcomes of SBM programs? And how do we ensure the longevity of such programs? Wheeler, Keller and DuBois believe that SBM programs surveyed have immediate short-term impact on protecting the youth from becoming involved in problem behaviour: truancy, absenteeism and school-related

misbehaviour. The authors suggest that once these goals have been realised then it is possible to see the impact on academic achievements. Consequently, it may be more realistic to place goals of academic performance for the longer-term, as it appears that there is a sequence involved. The three surveys also indicate that mentoring can cultivate and help students achieve interpersonal relationships.

In order to help policy and decision makers with regards to the future and development of SBM programs, the authors suggests the following for consideration:

1. The need for longitudinal studies with follow-up measurements to determine impact over time
2. Evaluations of more innovative programs
3. A cost benefit analysis of the factors that are more effective

"... mentees had improved across a number of indicators including academic performance as a result of participating in the program..."

Wheeler, Keller and DuBois indicate that SBM programs have a small but significant impact on school based success, but it is more likely that such programs will affect the "more proximal behaviours and beliefs that keep students engaged in school and that are likely to foster learning" (16). For SBM to impact on academic success, we need to adopt a longer term outlook and to consider which mentoring models will work best for the students in need.

Spotlight

Mentoring Programs and the Impact of Mentoring Young People in Foster Care

This quarter, we look at whether youth mentoring has an impact on youth in foster care. We review of the following:



- Munson, Michelle R. and Susan E. Smalling, Renée Spencer, Lionel D. Scott Jr. and Elizabeth M. Tracy. 2010. “A steady presence in the midst of change: Non-kin natural mentors in the lives of older youth exiting foster care.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 32: 527-535
- Greeson, Johanna KP and Natasha K. Bowen. 2008. “‘She Holds My Hands’ The Experiences of Foster Youth with Their Mentors.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 30: 1178-1188.
- Diehl, David C., Robin B. Howse and Carol M. Trivette. 2010. “Youth in Foster Care: Developmental Assets and Attitudes Towards Adoption and Mentoring.” *Child and Family Social Work* 10:1-12

The three articles in this edition’s Spotlight highlight the need to further provide support mechanisms for youth “aging out” of the foster care system. Various studies have shown that the transition period from foster care to independent adult life is challenging for the youth and s/he is vulnerable to a range of risky behaviours. Accordingly, the role of an adult, a natural mentor can help ease the process of transition.

The articles by Munson and co-authors (2010) and Greeson and Bowen (2008) identify that the qualities found in a natural mentoring relationship is crucial to the adjustment and well-being of the youth. Diehl, Howse and Trivette approach their study by seeking to understand the attitudes of foster youth towards adoption and mentoring.

In relation to the first two articles, a natural mentor is generally an adult in the life of the foster youth who is not stranger, perhaps a foster parent,

professional or close family friend. The presence of one caring adult in this period of transition has been identified as a protective factor for youth at-risk. Greeson and Bowen (2008) posits that natural mentoring may be more beneficial to foster youth rather than programmatic mentoring as the relationship forms naturally and less likely to be pressured. As the natural mentor is not a stranger, trust is more likely to be built and the relationship is likely to endure.

The study by Munson *et al.* (2010) suggests that successful mentoring relationships is predicated on respect, authenticity, mutuality and empathy which leads to the psychological growth of the foster youth. A survey of 189 respondents indicated that the qualities of a natural mentor, specifically a mentor’s ability to relate to the youth’s situation was critical. The ability to relate to the youth and their situation not only led to the development of trust,

authenticity, respect and empathy within the relationship but it also point towards the potential longevity of the relationship. The nature of support that is a broad-based support (instrumental tangible support, informational support and emotional support) offered by the mentor was also critical in keeping the youth on “track”. Such support also demonstrated to the youth that they were valued.

While smaller in scale, Greeson and Bowen arrived at similar conclusions in their study of seven New England female adolescents aged between 13 and 20 selected. Five themes emerged from their interviews: characteristics of the relationship that matter, support received, individual change, future and perceptions of foster care. The building of trust between the natural mentor and the youth will impact on the other relationships within the youth’s life. Through the love and care that these youths received from their natural mentor, led to the development of trust. This is strongly linked to the respondents’ perception that their relationship with their natural mentors mirrored that of parent-child.

The above two studies conclude in a similar fashion, the many losses felt by the young person in the foster care system can be off-set if a natural mentor is present. Not only will the natural mentor be a source of moral and emotional support, the natural mentor is an anchor point as the youth transitions from foster care to independent adulthood.

The third article approaches the issue of foster youth from a positive youth development framework. This framework seeks to refocus on seeing the youth as a competent and contributing member of society with the capacity to learn. By understanding the youth’s attitude to adoption and mentoring, Diehl, Howse and Trivette establishes a research framework that provides an important step to comprehending and giving legitimacy to the views of foster youth. Fifty-four participants aged between 10.8 and 17. 3 were interviewed, 33 Caucasian and 21 African American. The study found that youth’s with a sense self-competency and being able to control



their lives displayed attitudes suggesting that adoption and mentoring were not necessarily for them. For these youths, adoption may erode away their independence and mentoring would open them to criticisms. These youth tend to have more interaction with adults and are more positive about themselves. Nonetheless, the authors conclude that in general, the participants demonstrated positive attitudes toward adoption and mentoring.

“the many losses felt by the young person in the foster care system can be off-set if a natural mentor is present...”

This edition of Spotlight illustrates the need to refocus future studies on natural mentoring relationships as it is clear that youth transitioning out of foster care require guidance to meet the various challenges of adulthood. Natural mentoring relationships are important subjects of study because it will assist us to implement potential actions and policies in the support of foster youth “aging out” of the system and resources we can provide their natural mentors to better equip them in such a relationship. Moreover, the final article highlights an important aspect of research that is understudied, the perspective of foster youths, and mentees in general with regards to mentoring relationships. By re-orienting our focus on the mentees and listening to their perspectives, it will help a more appropriate design of mentoring programs suited to the youths in need.

After School Programs that Promote Social Skills

Durlak, Joseph A. and Roger P. Weissberg. 2010. "A Meta-Analysis of After School Programs that Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 45: 294-309



Studies on After School Programs (ASPs) have indicated a range of effectiveness but a meta-analysis of different programs by Durlak and Weissberg suggests that ASPs "can be a prime community setting for enhancing young people's development" (2010: 295).

The authors examined 75 reports, evaluating 69 different programs. ASPs were selected for the study within the following criteria: (a) occurred during at least part of the school year; (b) happened outside of normal school hours; and (c) was supervised by adult. In addition, the programs had to include in their goals the development of one or more personal or social skills.

The meta-analysis showed that ASPs affected change in the student in three

positive areas: "feelings and attitudes, indicators of behavioural adjustment, and school performance" (Durlak and Weissberg 2010: 302). Moreover, students participating in ASPs had increased self-perception, attachment to school, and improvements could be detected in social behaviours, school grades and test scores (Ibid).

Durlak and Weissberg suggest that an appropriate amount of contact time is needed to achieve a level of desirable results. In addition, elements of effective ASPs include the adherence to SAFE: sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. Regardless of the varying results in the evaluation of ASPs, the authors conclude that there is evidence to suggest that promoting skill development can lead to a student's performance in the school.



" ... students participating in ASPs had increased self-perception, attachment to school, and improvements could be detected in social behaviours, school grades and test scores... "

The Role of the Mentor Youth Bond

Renick, Thomson, Nicole and Debra H. Zand. 2010. "Mentees' Perception of Their Interpersonal Relationships: The Role of the Mentor-Youth Bond." *Youth Society* 41:434-445

Few studies have examined the quality of mentor-mentee relationship as reported by youth. Renick and Zand seek to fill this gap in the literature by studying the mentees' perception of mentoring relationships. The research used three concepts as identified by Spence (2006) to determine a successful mentoring relationship: authenticity, empathy and companionship.

The research drew on the Project: Youth Connect funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (USA) with a sample of 205 youths ranging from the ages of nine to sixteen who were identified as at-risk to substance abuse. The respondents were interviewed after eight months of participation in the mentoring program.

The study indicated youths who found mentoring relationships to be authentic, empathetic and mentors as companions impacted on the success of the program. Additionally, such positive relationships could positively affect other forms of relationship in the youth's life. The study posits that mentoring is important for the development of socio-emotional aspects of the young person at-risk and thus invites further study in this area.



“...youths who found mentoring relationships to be authentic, empathetic and mentors as companions impacted on the success of the program...”

For tools and resources for mentors visit the
AUSTRALIAN YOUTH MENTORING NETWORK Website
<http://www.youthmentoring.org.au/info-for-mentors.html>



The Australian Youth Mentoring website has many resources and tools for program coordinators and mentors. The most popular tool on our website are our fact-sheets. These can be downloaded for free for your to print or you can purchase printed copies from our webshop.

Topics for our mentor factsheets include:

- Adolescent Issues
- [Building Relationships](#)
- Getting to Know Your Mentee
- [Trouble-shooting the Relationship](#)
- Careers and Job-seeking
- [Dealing with Bullying](#)
- Anger Management
- [Leaving School—Where to Now?](#)
- Ice-Breakers
- [Mentoring Boys](#)
- Helping Your Mentee Deal with Stress
- [Dealing with Grief or Loss](#)



To view our mentor factsheets go to:

www.youthmentoring.org.au/factsheets.html

To view our coordinator factsheets go to:

www.youthmentoring.org.au/practitioner_factsheets.html

