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The Australian Youth Mentoring Network, Australia's peak mentoring body, is a national hub for youth mentoring research, tools and resources



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Welcome to the Summer 2015 edition of the Research Quarterly. Each quarter, we aim to provide you with a summary of recent research articles on youth mentoring.

As the context in which youth mentoring occurs affect what happens in the mentor-mentee pair, the research quarterly publication brings together a diverse group of papers to help mentors and program staff better understand how youth mentoring relationships can be effective

This quarter, we look at three articles covering a range of topics including mentoring high risk youth, mentoring for changes in health, and mentoring in a culturally diverse scenario.

youthmentoring.org.au

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“With peer mentors, the promotion of health behaviour change can be tailored to personal interests, talents, and the contextual environment.”

Peer mentoring for health behaviour change Mentors

Petosa, R.L., & Smith, L.H. (2014). Peer mentoring for health behaviour change: A systematic review. *American Journal of Health Education*, 45, 351-357.

Introduction:

We know that quality youth mentoring programs have been shown to promote a myriad of positive outcome for youth and a recent paper has found that peer mentoring can be a powerful complement to health instruction. The paper found that mentoring has been used to change health behaviours and promote sustainable lifestyle patterns in adults and, more recently, among adolescents. This article reviews the use of peer mentoring to promote health practices and describes how this approach can be used in school settings.

Method:

A systematic review of the literature from 1990 and present day identified evaluation studies on the effectiveness of peer mentoring for promoting health behaviour change. In order to be reviewed, articles had to meet the following criteria:

- Peer mentors were the primary form of intervention
- The study reported on the impact evaluation of the program
- Mentees' health behaviour changes were evaluated

In this instance health behaviours included, physical activity, diet practices, substance use prevention, and smoking prevention. The study also examined peer mentoring with adults that looked at increasing: condom use, breastfeeding, cancer screenings, and smoking cessation

Results:

A growing literature supports peer mentoring as an effective approach to health behaviour change. This may be explained by the adolescents tend to view their peers as more credible and having a better understanding of the concerns of young people. The study found that peer mentoring allows for the incorporation of skill-building activities; reinforcement of self-regulation activities;

The AYMN produces a number of factsheets to help mentors develop their relationship with their mentees—for more information, go to:
www.youthmentoring.org.au/factsheets.html

engagement in individual and group activities; and social support to meet personal health goals. In particular the study found that for peer mentoring of adolescents

- Decrease in problem behaviours (gang membership, hurting others in physical fights, risk taking)
- Peer mentored groups showed decreases in smoking
- Lower rates of drug use
- Trained peer mentors felt more comfortable seeking adult support for suicide risk
- Increases in female's total physical activity

Conclusions:

This literature review demonstrates that the use of peer mentoring is an effective approach for promoting health behaviours, among both adults and adolescents. These findings also show how peer mentoring is an effective intervention for hard to reach and marginalized populations. Social cognitive theory supports these findings in suggesting that peers have the ability to strongly influence each other because people are more likely to imitate the behaviour to those they see as similar to themselves.

Implications:

With peer mentors, the promotion of health behaviour change can be tailored to personal interests, talents, and the contextual environment. Mentoring programs can benefit schools by establishing social networks using positive role models of health behaviours as mentors.

Mentoring Youth at High Risk

Lakind, D., Eddy, J., & Zell, A. (2014) **Mentoring Youth at High Risk: The Perspectives of Professional Mentors. *Child & Youth Care Forum, Vol. 43 Issue 6, p705***

Background

Youth mentoring programs rely largely on volunteers, but youth facing significant risks may be poor candidates for volunteer-based interventions. Full-time "professional" mentors in highly structured programs may be better suited to partner

effectively with such youth and their families, but few studies examine professional mentoring interventions. Because of mentoring's inherent flexibility, mentors' role conceptualizations can profoundly influence the nature of their work. Serving as a professional mentor may have important implications for how mentors conceptualize and perform their role.

Objective

This qualitative study examined the role conceptions of professional mentors serving at-risk youth.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews with mentors were transcribed, coded, and subjected to thematic analysis*.

Results

Mentors described the importance of "professionalism" in prioritizing mentoring, expending considerable effort, and performing difficult or unpleasant tasks. They reported that serving multiple children full-time enabled them to rapidly build expertise, that credibility and authority granted them because of their professional status facilitated their work across multiple key contexts, and that their expertise and long-term commitment facilitated the development of deep relationships. Mentors perceived their role as highly challenging but reported high self-efficacy. They described high multifaceted organizational support, a community for youth, and an individualized child focus.

Conclusions

A mentoring model delivered by experienced professional mentors may hold promise for working with youth at high risk. The role conceptualizations of mentors and the organizational culture within which mentors work may be important in helping youth succeed.

**Thematic analysis is the most common form of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within data. Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to a specific research question.*

Black adolescents' relationships with natural mentors:

Hurd, N., & Sellers, R. (2013) Black adolescents' relationships with natural mentors: Associations with academic engagement via social and emotional development. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, Vol 19(1), 76-85

Background:

Researchers have long understood the positive role that natural mentoring relationships play in affecting youth's academic attitudes and engagement, as well as other behavioural and interpersonal outcome that Black adolescents may experience and to connect these relationship types to academic outcomes via social and emotional development. In this study, Hurd and colleagues seek to identify the relationship characteristics need to be in place in order for these relationships to maximize their full potential. Previous research has found that the quality of the mentoring relationship is an important factor.

Methods:

Data were collected from 259 adolescents attending 3 middle schools in a Midwestern metropolitan area. Adolescents reported on whether or not they had a relationship with a natural mentor and answered several questions about characteristics of the relationship, as well as reporting on a number of indicators of positive development.

Results:

Analyses suggested two different types of natural mentoring relationships among study youth: less connected and more connected. Researchers found that in comparison with youth without a natural mentor, youth who had a more connected natural mentoring relationship had greater student-reported academic engagement via higher social skills

and psychological well-being and greater teacher-reported academic engagement via elevated social skills. They also found that youth with less connected natural mentoring relationships did not differ from their counterparts without natural mentors on social skills, psychological well-being, or student- or teacher-reported academic engagement.

Conclusion:

Findings from the current study suggest the strength of the connection formed between mentors and youth was associated with youth's academic engagement through its influence on youth's social and psychological well-being. The findings support previous research highlighting the importance of relationship characteristics (e.g., match duration, intensity and quality) in shaping the relationship's trajectory, and subsequent benefits of relationships with non-parental adults. The study's findings also provide a better understanding of factors that may be important within the experiences of Black adolescents' natural mentoring relationships, particularly the types of relationships within which youth thrive best.

Is your program on the right track? Use our Online Self-Assessment Tool (OSAT) to identify whether your program is meeting the Youth Mentoring Benchmarks and help understand where your program's strengths and weaknesses lie. To use OSAT, go to:

www.youthmentoring.org.au/osat/intro.php