About the Research in Action Series

Overview

Last year, MENTOR released the *National Agenda for Action: How to Close America's Mentoring Gap*. Representing the collective wisdom of the mentoring field, the *Agenda* articulates five key strategies and action items necessary to move the field forward and truly close the mentoring gap. In an effort to address one of these critical strategies—elevating the role of research—MENTOR created the Research and Policy Council, an advisory group composed of the nation's leading mentoring researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

In September 2006, MENTOR convened the first meeting of the Research and Policy Council with the goal of increasing the connection and exchange of ideas among practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to strengthen the practice of youth mentoring. The *Research in Action* series is the first product to evolve from the work of the Council—taking current mentoring research and translating it into useful, user-friendly materials for mentoring practitioners.

With research articles written by leading scholars, the series includes ten issues on some of the most pressing topics facing the youth mentoring field:

Issue 1:   Mentoring: A Key Resource for Promoting Positive Youth Development

Issue 2:   Effectiveness of Mentoring Program Practices

Issue 3:   Program Staff in Youth Mentoring Programs: Qualifications, Training, and Retention

Issue 4:   Fostering Close and Effective Relationships in Youth Mentoring Programs

Issue 5:   Why Youth Mentoring Relationships End

Issue 6:   School-Based Mentoring

Issue 7:   Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

Issue 8:   Mentoring Across Generations: Engaging Age 50+ Adults as Mentors

Issue 9:   Youth Mentoring: Do Race and Ethnicity Really Matter?

Issue 10: Mentoring: A Promising Intervention for Children of Prisoners
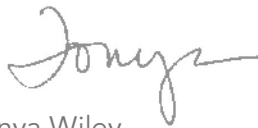
Using the Series

Each issue in the series is designed to make the scholarly research accessible to and relevant for practitioners and is composed of three sections:

1. **Research:** a peer-reviewed article, written by a leading researcher, summarizing the latest research available on the topic and its implications for the field;

2. **Action:** a tool, activity, template, or resource, created by MENTOR, with concrete suggestions on how practitioners can incorporate the research findings into mentoring programs; and

3. **Resources:** a list of additional resources on the topic for further research.

As you read the series, we invite you to study each section and consider what you can do to effectively link mentoring research with program practice. Please join us in thanking the executive editor, Dr. Jean Rhodes, and the author of this issue, Dr. Michael Karcher, for graciously contributing their time and expertise to this project.

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Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

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Cross-age peer mentoring is a unique and somewhat different approach to mentoring than the better-known adult-with-youth mentoring model. In cross-age mentoring programs (CAMPs) the mentor is an older youth, typically high school-aged, who is paired or matched with an elementary or middle school-aged child. Meetings almost always take place in the school context, although there probably are countless camps, youth centers, and other youth organizations which informally, or for a short duration, pair younger youth with older youth for the purpose of providing the younger youth guidance, social support, or instruction.

This article focuses primarily on one-to-one relationships between teenage mentors and younger mentees in the schools for two reasons. First, because descriptions and evaluation data on these programs in other contexts are rarely reported in the research literature, it is unknown what the impact of such programs are or how their practice may vary from setting to setting. Second, no reports of cross-age peer mentors working with multiple youth in a group mentoring format were found in the literature search conducted to inform this article. This makes it hard, at this time, to know how group peer mentoring programs (i.e., one mentor with several mentees) operate and what the potential benefits might be. Therefore, CAMPs, as described here, are generally one-on-one and usually in the school context, as these were the most commonly reported types of programs in the research literature.

Typically, in cross-age peer mentoring, high school-aged mentors work with children at school, either in the classroom, after school, or during lunch. Meetings typically last one hour, sometimes two, and take place weekly and operate for the duration of the school year. The meetings often occur within a larger group, such as where ten to 20 pairs may meet in one location at a school sometimes engaging in group-based activities for all or part of the meeting.

The growth and popularity of this approach is best exemplified by its place within Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of America. The High School Bigs (HS Bigs) program, which is BBBS's cross-age model, now compromises nearly a fourth of all matches made through BBBS organizations each year. Keoki Hansen, Director of Research for BBBS, reported "About 41 percent of our school-based matches are with high school-[aged] volunteers. Last year we served approximately 95,000 youth in school-based programs, so about 39,000 of those youth are being served by high school volunteers" (personal communication, July 16, 2004). This number continues to grow each year suggesting cross-age peer mentoring programs are here to stay.

This school-based, peer-driven structure has several elements which make it very appealing to mentees, mentors, and school staff, and which may explain the rapid proliferation of such programs in recent years. Similarly, for youth whose parents may be wary of or unwilling to seek out an adult mentor for their child, school-based cross-age peer mentoring may be less threatening to them and may be the only way their child will get to interact with a mentor. Unfortunately, as with the mentoring field as a whole, the practice has outpaced research and the result has been a preponderance of under-structured CAMPs.

In the next two sections, important definitions are given to set the stage for discussing the extant literature on cross-age peer mentoring. Establishing a clear definition allows for an examination of research in seemingly disparate fields, such as peer counseling, peer assistance, and peer education, when what has been reported in those fields is more accurately peer mentoring. With this definition in place, research on the benefits of such programs for mentors and mentees is reviewed, and issues related to training, supervision, and termination of matches, which have emerged in the research literature, are highlighted. Finally, drawing from literature in the fields of intervention and youth development more broadly, potentially important processes for structuring CAMPs, such as peer influence, are discussed.

Toward a Definition of Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

There is great variability in the youth mentoring literature in how peer mentoring is described. Literature searches using "peer mentoring," both on Google and in academic research databases, reveal hundreds of references to corporate and teacher peer mentoring, peer counseling, and same-age peer programs. Even including "youth" as a qualifier generates multiple studies on peer tutoring, mentoring-as-teaching, and peer education programs (e.g., King, Staffeiri, & Adelgais, 1998; O'Donnell & Michalak, 1997). Therefore, a definition of peer mentoring, at least the term as it is used here, will help differentiate peer tutoring, helping, counseling, and assistance from children-with-adolescent-mentors programs (or "CAMPs," Noll, 1999) (see Table 1).

The first distinction necessary to defining peer mentoring is between tutoring and mentoring, which can be made by considering the goals of each. Although tutoring may happen during mentoring, if the relationship and the youth's development, broadly speaking, remain paramount, the relationship is a mentoring one. The mentoring literature, however, reveals two types of instructional or goal-focused mentoring which blur the boundaries between tutoring and mentoring. First, there is the objectionable "prescriptive" mentoring described by Morrow and Styles (1995). Second, there is the apprenticeship-like "instrumental" mentoring described by Hamilton and Hamilton (1990; see also Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006).

On the other end of the spectrum are programs, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, that focus on relationship development, helping mentees understand their value and importance as persons, and facilitating character development. This is referred to as "developmental" or "psychosocial." In the developmental approach, although a curriculum or other structural guide can be used, the goal is to provide empathy, friendship, and attention to the child and to establish a caring relationship with him or her. Any prescribed goals, whether career, academic, or behavioral, come second to being a friend. If one holds that tutoring is inherently instrumental, then mentoring, at least peer mentoring, must be developmental in nature and focus. Some have referred to cross-age peer mentoring as "developmental mentoring" to reinforce this distinction (Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002); to frame the role of the supervising adult (e.g., school counselor) within a developmental rather than a remedial framework (Kohlberg, 1975; Lerner, 1982); and to emphasize that both mentor and mentee can meet their unique developmental needs through this relationship arrangement.

This tutoring/mentoring distinction has become increasingly important following the rapid rise of both school-based mentoring and the Big Brothers Big Sisters High School Bigs program. The HS Bigs program is an example of an exemplary cross-age peer mentoring, not because it is the "best" or has bigger impacts than other programs, but rather because it (more than most other peer programs) allows the mentors the greatest latitude in terms of selecting with the mentee what they will do together. For example, in an evaluation of the HS Bigs program, most of the mentees reported they got to "engage in the activities of their choice" either Pretty Often (66 percent) or Sometimes (26 percent; as opposed to Not Very Often [3 percent] or Hardly Ever [5 percent]), and 84 percent described their High School Big as most like a "friend" (as opposed to a teacher [9 percent] or a parent [7 percent], Hansen, 2005).

Almost all of the other programs referenced in the literature provide a curriculum of some sort to structure the match. Some structure may be essential to effectively guide cross-age peer matches. Durlak and Weissberg (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of after-school programs and found that "effective approaches to skills development are sequential, active, focused, and explicit"(p. 6). Although structured and unstructured CAMPs have not been systematically compared, meta-analyses in the field of youth mentoring generally suggest structure can double the impact of most mentoring programs (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). Even BBBS is currently increasing the level of training and support it provides to HS Bigs relative to their adult mentors. But many peer programs provide so much structure it becomes unclear whether they refer to mentoring or tutoring (e.g., Cardenas, Montecel, Supik, & Harris, 1992; Payne, Cathcart, & Pecora, 1995).

A second distinction among peer programs is duration. Most peer counseling, education, tutoring, and helping relationships are short-term, either meeting a few times or for the duration of a project or curriculum sequence (e.g., six - ten meetings). CAMPs typically last throughout the school year or longer, meeting weekly 20-40 times a year. However, in one study of school-based mentoring, the average number of school-based match meetings was ten (Karcher, 2007). Suggesting CAMPs require ten or more planned meetings seems like a liberal minimum duration for an intervention to constitute a mentoring relationship. Therefore, studies of "mentoring" programs shorter than ten meetings were omitted from this review (e.g., Einoff, 2005).

A third distinction is whether or not the intervention is reparative, remedial, or problem-focused. If so, it is not likely cross-age peer mentoring. The developmental, friendship promoting, character developing nature of CAMPs is not consistent with goal-oriented efforts aimed primarily at improving academic skills (tutoring), resolving interpersonal problems (peer education; peer assistance), or addressing personal problems (counseling). Each of these topics may come up in conversation, but mentors do not enter the relationship with such narrow goals.

A fourth, key distinction is whether or not the program is cross-age in nature. The most widely accepted definition of a mentor, which is "an older, more experienced adult … [who] provides ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the protégé," (Rhodes, 2002, p. 3) explicitly refers to the mentor as an adult. Thus, at the very least, to consider an adolescent an "older and wiser" mentor, there should be an age difference. Although requiring that peer mentors always be cross-age seems obvious, a quick search using the term "peer mentoring" generates many references to programs that actually structure relationships between same-age peers (often in college). There is some evidence, noted below, that there are larger program effects where there is at least a two-year spread in age and/or the mentor and mentee attend different schools (e.g., elementary versus middle school). Therefore, while peer connotes "of same age," the term cross-age is a necessary qualifier used here to mean two or more grades or years of age separating the mentor and mentee. Of course, the term "peer" remains a necessary term to help to distinguish CAMPs from those fundamentally different cross-age mentoring programs that enlist elders as mentors.

In summary, cross-age peer mentoring programs utilize structure, meet for more than ten meetings, do not focus primarily on deficit or problem reduction, and require an age span of at least two years. Cross-age peer mentoring, defined this way, has yielded positive effects for both mentors and mentees alike.

Does Peer Mentoring Produce Positive Youth Outcomes?

Despite very limited research, there is evidence that cross-age peer mentoring can have beneficial effects for both the mentees and the mentors who provide it.

For Mentees

Although no large-scale, multi-site randomized study of the effects of CAMPs on mentees has been reported in the literature to date, small single-site randomized studies have revealed consistently positive findings. Key outcomes, on which changes have been reported in the cross-age peer mentoring literature are consistent with findings from adult-with-youth mentoring programs in schools (Portwood & Ayers, 2005). These include attitudes toward and connectedness to school and peers (Karcher, 2005a; Bowman & Myrick, 1987; Stoltz, 2005), self-efficacy (Stoltz, 2005; Tomlin, 1994), grades or academic achievement (Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002; Stoltz, 2005; Tomlin, 1994; Westerman, 2002), social skills (Karcher, 2005), and behavior problems (Bowman & Myrick, 1987), as well as gains in conventional attitudes toward illicit and antisocial behavior (Sheehan, DiCara, LeBailly, & Christoffel, 1999). In one comparison of six randomized studies of school-based mentoring (Karcher, 2006), the size of the effects on connectedness to school for the three cross-age peer mentoring programs were "large" while the effects for the three adult-with-youth school-based mentoring programs were "small" (consistent with DuBois et al., 2002). However, across the majority of other outcomes, cross-age mentors did not appear to be more effective than adult mentors, and most of these cross-age studies utilized small samples which limited the statistical conclusion validity. In contrast, very small and non-significant effects have been found for cross-age peer programs enlisting middle school-aged mentors to work with elementary-aged children (Akos, 2000), which suggests high school mentors may be more effective than middle school-aged mentors.

For Mentors

There is evidence from studies of CAMPs that participating as a high school mentor can have positive effects. The findings are consistent with beneficial effects reported for service learning, peer mediating, and tutoring (Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 2000; Yogev & Ronen, 1982), and with the growing literature on the role of extracurricular activities in adolescent development (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988). For example, a randomized study of 129 high school students found improvements in moral reasoning and empathy after youth served as peer mentors (Ikard, 2001). Another reported that "a positive experience with the peer mentoring program was predictive of a more favorable connection to school" (Stoltz, 2005, p. 11). Noll (1997), using informal assessments, noted that ninth grade mentor "volunteers reported such beneficial advantages as the ability to relate better to parents, an increase in self-esteem, better conflict resolution skills, and enhanced organization skills" (p. 241). Similarly, in an evaluation of the HS Bigs program, "The HS Bigs felt mentoring helped them to improve their ability to communicate with

children, to become more responsible, [and] to forge a stronger connection to their community and school" (Hansen, 2006, p. 3; also see Hansen, 2005). One pre-post quasi-experimental study of 53 rural cross-age mentors revealed medium-sized improvements in connectedness to school and on self-esteem compared to a comparison group of 71 same-aged youth from their school (Karcher, 2006).

Whether the effects on mentors differ by age or gender is unclear at present. Some findings suggest that males may benefit more than females from serving as mentors (Switzer, Simmons, Dew, Regalski, & Wang, 1995). The effects of programs on the middle and elementary school-aged peer mentors and peer helpers have tended to be non-significant or smaller than the effects for high school-aged mentors/helpers (Bowman & Myrick, 1987), which suggests older mentors may benefit more (as well as be more effective, as noted above).

Several cautionary reports also suggest that the effects of such programs shrink or become negative when insufficient support is provided in the way of training, monitoring, and consequences for mentor immaturity. The mentoring and peer helping literature reviewed below reveals several important lessons from mentoring and related research that should be considered by program planners.

The Risks and Rewards of Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Programs

The subtitle of Jean's Rhodes' classic book *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth* is even more applicable to the practice of CAMPs because, left unstructured, such programs may run a higher risk of causing harm. Indeed, some noted experts in mentoring have expressed concerns about whether or not high school students have the required maturity and interpersonal resources to actually "mentor" younger youth. Supporting their claims, there is increasing evidence that when cross-age peer mentoring is not adequately supported by adult guidance and supervision, such programs will be less effective and have the capacity to do as much harm as good (Karcher, 2005a). This may occur because, when "left to their own devices," without adequate support or "mentoring" from program staff, high school mentors probably have a greater ability to model and thereby encourage age-inappropriate, unconventional, risk-taking behaviors to their mentees.

Do No Harm

The second key "take-home message" has to be that peer influence is the double-edged sword of CAMPs. Although working with an older peer may make it easier for elementary and middle school mentees to identify with, esteem, and emulate their teen mentors in prosocial, academically encouraging, and future-oriented ways relative to adult mentors, high school mentors likely may have a far greater capacity to encourage risk-taking and authority undermining behaviors. Tom Dishion and his colleagues have coined this "deviancy training" (Patterson, Dishion, & Yoerger, 2000).

The Power of Peers

Children and youth take their peers' and other youths' assessments of them very seriously, which means that a good relationship with a high school mentor may convey important messages to a youth about her or his worth, likeability, and attractiveness to others. Conversely, failed peer matches, particularly those lacking appropriate closure (i.e., such that the mentee is left to decipher for herself why her mentor no longer comes to visit her), may lead youth to experience rejection and feel worse about their worth and attractiveness to others. For example, in a study of a rural CAMP, there were two different "effects" of the program depending on how frequently the mentor attended the after-school mentoring sessions (Karcher, 2005a). The more consistent the mentors were, the greater their mentees' gains in social skills, connectedness, and self-esteem. Conversely, the more infrequently the mentors attended, the less attractive their mentees reported feeling at year's end.

The Potential for Loss

One key program "take-home message" is that matches must be closely supervised and monitored to ensure that mentors are attending to their mentees during mentoring meetings. Additionally, when a given mentor begins to miss meetings, staff must intervene to fix the situation, either by encouraging the mentor to attend more regularly or by helping the mentee to understand the loss of the mentor and to not personalize the mentor's absence. It is for this reason that Lakes and Karcher (2005) developed a termination ritual which can be downloaded from MENTOR's Web site (See Resources). Fortunately, because the mentors typically are students in a nearby school, program staff are usually better able to get the mentor and mentee together to conduct this "ritual" in which the mentee is helped to understand that the dissolution of the match is not because of his or her likeability or worth. This is in contrast with adult-with-youth mentoring, where even when conducted in schools, once mentors decides to quit, it can be very hard to get them to return to participate in such a termination ritual. While most people probably don't intuitively understand the importance of a good "termination," how the relationship ends has long been known as one of the key elements of successful therapy.

In summary, existing research indicates matches should be monitored closely for (a) mentors modeling deviant behavior (e.g., mentors telling inappropriate jokes to same-age peers in presence of their younger mentees); (b) unplanned and unexplained absences; and (c) frustration among overwhelmed mentors. Matches in which mentors are inconsistent should be quickly "terminated" using a formal process, such as the mentoring termination ritual described above, to minimize the negative effects of the loss for the mentee.

What Are the Characteristics of Effective Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Programs?

For these reasons, having a shared understanding of the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship and clear expectations for their interactions is probably just as, if not more, important for cross-age mentees and mentors as for adult mentors. First, however, a picture of what typically occurs in a developmental approach may be instructive.

Keoki Hansen of BBBS conducted several descriptive evaluations of their HS Bigs program (Hansen, 2005, 2006) which describe the nature of these developmental interactions. Most interesting and instructive are her findings regarding activities. Of course, these activity patterns reflect, in large part, the developmental status of the elementary school-aged mentees who are usually paired with the High School Bigs, but also may be due to the nature of a given youth-with-child mentoring relationship. She found most matches engaged in physical activities, general talking, and crafts or board games. In fact, while playing one-on-one games was related to better outcomes, the more the match worked on academics (e.g., tutoring) the less likely they were to be rematched for a second year.

In addition, a variety of non-academic curricula have been used by other programs to provide additional structure. Some programs utilize peer-based programs like Project Northland (Einoff, 2005; Komro & Perry, 1996), curricula specific to CAMPs (e.g., Dennison, 2000; Karcher, 2000), or curriculum from other peer helping approaches (Bowman & Myrick, 1987). One study used filial therapy (parents as play therapists to their children) training procedures to train high school-aged peer mentors to take on a non-directive, play-based orientation (i.e., non-instrumental) in their role as mentors (Jones, 2001).

Mentee Orientation

Mentees may benefit from being given an orientation on how best to "utilize" their mentors by seeking out the mentors' support. In a study of one CAMP program, Karcher, Nakkula, and Harris (2005) surveyed 63 high school mentors two months into the match and then again at six months to identify predictors of relationship quality. They report that although the mentees' risk status, parental involvement, and program quality were correlated with relationship quality, the best predictors at both time points were how much the mentor believed she or he would be successful (self-efficacy) and how much the mentee sought out the support of the mentor. Both of these qualities can be inculcated through mentor and mentee training events.

Mentor Training and Ongoing Support

High school mentors may become more easily overwhelmed than older mentors, especially when working with children who have behavioral problems. This may be especially so when the mentors approach mentoring with a goal of having fun and spending time with peers (as opposed to having the primary goal of being a helper). In one study, Karcher and Lindwall (2003) found that high school mentors who were lower on Crandall's Social Interest Scale (SIS) were less likely to continue into a second year. This is consistent with Karcher et al. (2005) who found that mentors high in self-interest (desires for self-enhancement) reported lower relationship quality. Conversely, Karcher and Lindwall (2003) found those high in SIS took on those mentees at greater behavioral and academic risk.

Therefore, to increase retention, programs might want to recruit youth who are more socially interested, but such programs also may need to provide considerable support to these mentors who may take on too much and become overwhelmed.

Developmental Considerations

Elementary-aged students may be too young to serve as mentors. One reason may be simply that they are not likely to be able to see things from their mentees' perspective (Selman, 1980) or find it easy to reign in their impulse to have fun (rather than to remain focused on their mentee). In a study of the Buddy Program (Westerman, 2002), fourth graders who mentored younger children made smaller gains than fourth graders who were mentored by college students. Similarly, there is evidence that high school PALs are more effective than middle school PALs when using a specific, non-directive and playful approach (i.e., more like mentoring than tutoring; see Baggerly, 1999 versus Rhine, 2000).

Additional information, beyond that available through MENTOR and in the *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* (DuBois & Karcher, 2005) for mentoring programs in general, may be found on a variety of organizational Web sites. Sites, such as for the Peer Assistance and Leadership (PAL®, 2007) and National Peer Helpers Association (NPHA, 2007), address the unique issues of supporting adolescents helping younger adolescents, but typically they do not differentiate between those programs and practices that have empirical support and those that do not. For example, there are materials that have been developed to address the training needs of cross-age peer mentors (Cox, 2006; Karcher, 2002; YouthLaunch, 2007) but these have not been systematically evaluated.

Similarly, there have been descriptions of pairings of adolescent mentors with children with specific gifts or needs (e.g., Wright & Borland, 1992) reported in the literature. CAMPs might provide a unique way to facilitate community, decrease stigma, and foster self-esteem, but they have not been adequately studied to determine their actual benefits for these subgroups of children. Given the possibility for harm through misguided, unstructured, and poorly monitored programs, care should be taken when applying CAMPs in novel ways.

Based on the evidence from the literature, there is sufficient evidence to make the following recommendations. Cross-age peer mentoring programs may operate best when:

1. Mentors are trained in a developmental approach to avoid becoming tutors;

2. Mentors who report greater social interest and less self-interested motivations are strategically recruited;

3. Mentors and mentees differ in age by at least two years, and the mentors are in high school (sophomores and juniors);

4. Programs provide mentors sufficient structure to keep the matches actively engaged, but the mentors' focus is clearly on strengthening their relationship;

5. Mentoring interactions are monitored for signs of "deviancy training";

6. Mentees are taught how best to utilize their mentors for support; and

7. Mentors are required to participate in formal termination processes.

The potential of CAMPs to effect both the mentors' and mentees' development and school connectedness through the same intervention, however, holds great promise and warrants continued study and refinement. Given the rising number of cross-age mentoring programs, it will be worthwhile for researchers and program staff to collaborate in order to study when cross-age peer mentoring works best, for whom, and to what ends, and then use these insights to guide program planning. Although there is promise, there remains a great deal to be learned about the most efficient and effective ways to utilize older peers in mentoring relationships.

Table 1: Drawing Distinctions Among Several Peer-to-Peer Interventions

	Structured (e.g., using a curriculum)	Long-term (lasting more than ten weeks)	Problem-focused or remedial	Cross-age (difference in grade of two or more)	One-to-one relationship format
Peer mentoring	Sometimes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Peer counseling	No	No	Yes (personal)	Not usually	Usually, but not necessarily
Peer helping; PALs (Peer Assistance and Leadership)	Yes	Not usually	Sometimes	Yes, usually	Both one-to-one and one helper with multiple youth formats
Peer mediation	Yes	No	Yes	Not usually	No, one mediator with two plus peers
Peer tutoring	No	No	Yes (academic)	Sometimes	Usually, but not necessarily

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Notes

Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

The growth in the use of young people as mentors to other youth during the last few years has been astounding. In part due to the shortage of adult mentors, many programs are turning to young people, especially high school students, as an alternative solution. For example, almost half of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America's school-based matches (almost a quarter of their total matches) use High School Bigs to mentor younger children. These programs need guidance and clarification to make them as effective as possible. In his article, Dr. Karcher defines cross-age peer mentoring, distinguishes it from other interventions including peer counseling, and outlines key practices that predict success. This action section uses Dr. Karcher's findings to develop practical implications for program design and implementation.

## Part I: Designing a Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Program

The following diagrams are designed to help program staff determine the appropriateness of using a cross-age peer mentoring model—based on available research—given factors of program design (setting, match structure, and mentee age) and the desired outcomes of the program. Once programs have determined that the model is appropriate, Part II provides detailed information about the implications of using this model on various program practices.

Figure 1: Should your program consider using a cross-age peer mentoring model based on your program's structure?
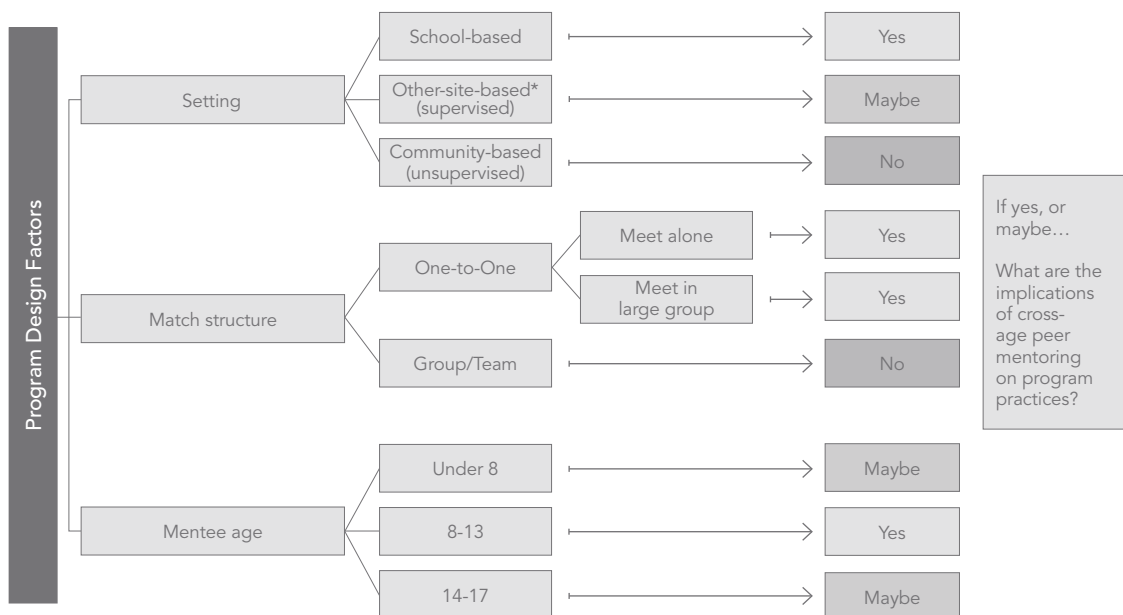
*Includes site-based programs that do not take place in school or after-school settings (e.g. faith-based, juvenile justice, etc.)

Figure 2: Should your program consider using a cross-age peer mentoring model based on these desired program outcomes?
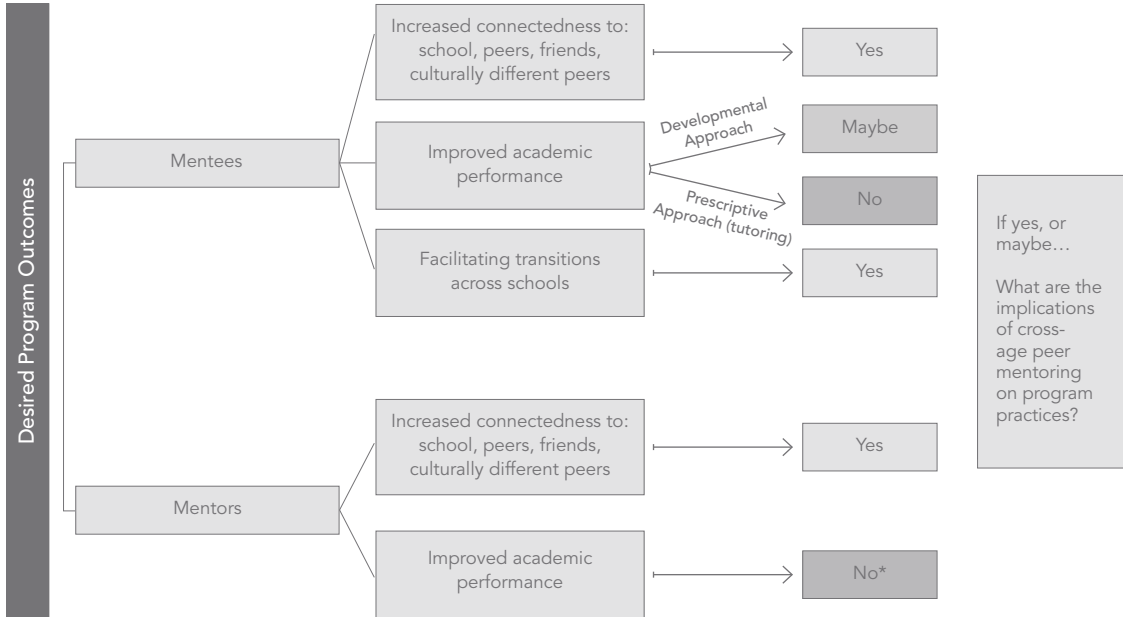
Programs seeking improved academic outcomes should consider involving these youth as mentees rather than mentors.

Part II: Implications of Cross-Age Peer Mentoring on Program Practices

Practice	Implications (what)	Rationale (why)
Frequency/ duration of meetings	Clear expectations for mentors and mentees regarding: • Frequency of meetings • Duration of meetings • Duration of match • Closure process	Mentor absenteeism may result in decreased mentee self-esteem and increased behavior problems.
Recruitment	Mentors: • Look for youth who are caring, helpful, and interested in others. Mentees: • Avoid recruiting only high-risk youth; instead look for mixed-risk status among mentees.	Mentors: • These youth tend to be more committed to the program and the match. They also may be more willing to work with challenging mentees. Mentees: • In groups of all high-risk youth there is a possibility of deviancy training (reinforcement of bad behavior by the group). • Not all mentors are equipped to meet the demands of high-risk mentees.
Screening	Mentors: • A thorough screening process is essential. Instead of criminal background checks, programs should use in-depth personal references from diverse sources (e.g., teacher, employer, faith leader, coach, etc.)	Mentees may model negative behaviors of older peers.
Training	Mentors: • Initial and ongoing training that prepares and empowers mentors. Mentees: • Training that shows mentees how to make the most of the relationship.	Research shows that relationship quality is related to: • Mentors' self-efficacy. • Mentees' ability to seek support from their mentors.
Supervision	Regular and frequent monitoring and support of mentors by program staff.	Youth mentors need both structure and support to set realistic goals, problem-solve, and process their experience. Those who choose to work with challenging mentees need additional support to prevent burnout and possible negative mentor outcomes.
Activities	A curriculum or other set of structured activities that involves mentors and combines developmental and instrumental activities.	Youth mentors need structure to stay focused and engage with their mentees in activities that lead to positive mentee and mentor outcomes.

Other key considerations:

1. Mentors should be at least two years (or grades) older than mentees.

2. Parent involvement and support are crucial.

3. Collaboration and/or partnerships between sources of mentors and mentees and the program are required.

4. Cross-age peer mentoring is not "mentoring lite," and shouldn't be seen as an easier or cheaper alternative to adult-youth mentoring.

5. The potential to do harm is magnified as both mentees and mentors are vulnerable to negative outcomes. Proceed with caution.

Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. The leader in expanding the power of mentoring to millions of young Americans that want and need adult mentors. *www.mentoring.org*

- Mentor/Mentee Termination Ritual
  www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/operations/closure/
  terminationritual.doc

National Association of Peer Programs. Sponsors conferences and provides consultation for peer mentoring programs. *www.peerprograms.org/*

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory - National Mentoring Center. National organization that provides training and technical assistance to youth mentoring programs. *www.nwrel.org/mentoring*

- Peer Mentoring and Academic Success, Fact sheet.
  www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet7.pdf

Peer Resources. Canadian organization that supports peer mentoring. *www.peer.ca/peer.html*

- Bibliography of resources and information related to peer mentoring
  www.peer.ca/Docs.html

- Descriptions of types and settings of peer based mentoring
  www.peer.ca/peerprograms.html

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