Why we need to better understand cross-age peer mentoring programs

“About 41% of our school-based matches are with HS [high school aged] volunteers. Last year we served approximately 95,000 youth in SBM programs, so about 39,000 of those youth are being served by HS volunteers.”
(Keoki Hansen, Big Brothers Big Sisters, personal communication 7/16/04)

“The HS Bigs felt mentoring helped them to improve their ability to communicate with children, to become more responsible, to forge a stronger connection to their community and school.”
(BBBS Jack-in-the-Box Partnership Report, School Year 2002-2003, p. 3)
### Content: Structure using a General Curriculum is Good if Developmental

- A 3rd distinction: Is reparative, remedial, or problem-focused. If so, it is not cross-age peer mentoring?
- The developmental, friendship-promoting, character-fostering approach of cross-age peer mentoring is incompatible targeting specific goals—improving academic skills (tutoring), resolving interpersonal problems (peer education; peer assistance), or addressing personal problems (counseling).
- These topics may get addressed in conversation, but mentors do not begin with such narrow goals.

### Structure: Cross-age

- A 4th distinction: Is the program is cross-age?
- It is a stretch to consider an adolescent peer of the same age a mentor who is “older and wiser” (using Rhodes’ definition of mentor). Yet the term “peer mentoring” is often used, especially with college-age youth, to refer to programs among same-age peers (usually these reflect tutoring or counseling)
- In Cross-age peer mentoring there should be two or more grades/years separating mentor and mentee

### As a Prevention Approach

**Universal or Selective** (primary) prevention: Preventing or addressing early warning signs of problems (starting early with all or some groups of youth)

**Indicated** (secondary) prevention: Preventing the development of disorder from initial risk indicators

Prevention programs that work (Dryfoos, 1991):
1. Long in duration;
2. Link together child’s worlds;
3. Promote interpersonal connections


### Table from “Cross-Age Peer Mentoring”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring Form</th>
<th>Structured (e.g., using a curriculum)</th>
<th>Long-term (lasting more than 10 weeks)</th>
<th>Problem-focused or remedial (e.g., 2 or more grade differences)</th>
<th>How the program benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer mentoring</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer counseling</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (generally)</td>
<td>Not usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer helping;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PALs (Peer Assistance &amp; Leadership)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not usually</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Not usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-moderation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not usually</td>
<td>No, 1-with-2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer tutoring</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (academic)</td>
<td>Not usually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Outcomes: What we know

- The BBBS High School Bigs program was found (Herrera, et al., 2007) to have no impact that generalized across all youth.
- Subsequent analyses reveal some groups of youth benefit more than others. Appropriate structure (especially for after school programs) and recruiting highly motivated and compassionate mentors can produce impacts, primarily for mentees at “medium risk, suggesting the program has promise.
- More research on BBBS HSBigs is forthcoming.

### Smaller studies of programs with varying degrees of structure found

- Attitudes toward and connectedness to school and peers; self-efficacy;
- Grades or academic achievement;
- Social skills, behavior problems, conventional attitudes toward illicit and antisocial behavior

**See Karcher (2007) Research in Action piece**

The Cross-age Mentoring Program (CAMP) Children with Adolescent Mentors

- Program to be published by Education Northwest (National Mentoring Center)
- Created by Michael Karcher and others

CAMP Program Elements

- Goals: Primary prevention
- Duration: Annual program; 7 years long
- Content: Broad curriculum for fostering connectedness to self (present/future), others (peers, teachers, friends), and society (school, neighborhood, culture)
- Structure: Involves youth and adults

CAMP Primary Goal: Self-Development

- Providing praise, attention, and emotional affirmation from others (promotes self-esteem)
- Someone to idealize, emulate, and internalize (promotes connectedness, ideals, goals)
- Structure 1: A predictable & safe environment, where praise and punishment are clear, expectable, and consistent
- Structure 2: Opportunities to succeed--Someone to see it. (promotes skills)

CAMP Secondary Goal: Promote Connectedness

- Connectedness to self: Increasing self-esteem, increasing self-knowledge & future orientation (i.e., identity); anger coping & stress management skills.
- Connectedness to others: With friends, family, teachers, siblings and peers.
- Connectedness to society: School, community, other cultures, faith/virtues.

CAMP DEVELOPMENTAL MENTORING CURRICULUM

- Duration/Structure of Daily Interactions
  - What: Avoid deviancy training (presence of authority-undermining behaviors) and provide skill development opportunities using curricula
  - When: Mentoring 1 or 2 times a week, for 1-2 hours after school in a small group format
  - How (Developmental structure): Walk youth up the developmental ladder using icebreakers, touching base, prevention curricula, group play.
CAMP Structure: Players

- **Schools**: 1) Place for mentoring program; 2) recruitment source
- **Teachers**: Identify youth, inform mentors, rate behaviors
- **Program Directors**: School Counselor, Teacher, other Staff
- **Lead Mentors** (2 years of experience)
- **Mentors** (High school age students)
- **Proteges** (Middle school age students)
- **Mentees** (4th-6th grade students)

CAMP Structure: Who—Mentees

- **Grades 4-6**
- **Mixed risk status as identified by teachers.**

* Mixing youth of varying risk levels is intended to avoid both stigmatizing the program and discouraging deviant training effects of homogenous high risk groups, see Catteral, 1988; Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999

DuBois Best Practices (Data based)

**IMPORTANT PROGRAM COMPONENTS**
1. Monitor implementation of the program
2. Ongoing training
3. Structured activities
4. Parent involvement and support
5. Clear expectations for mentoring frequency

1. BBBS High School Bigs' program is exemplary in its emphasis on a developmental approach, but until recently it has not included above components.
2. CAMP has, and this may explain its larger effects.

Unique CAMP Structures

- **Meet and Greet Events!!!** (It’s magic: just do it!!!)
- **Termination Ritual** (available on MENTOR.org)
- **Monthly “Super Saturdays”** with parents
- **Parent meetings and reminder letters**;
- **Teacher input**: Identify youth, evaluate change, educate/encourage mentors
- **Youth Planned Curriculum**: Weekly “activity sheets” to guide mentors’ work (mentors adapt activities)
- **Mentor training manual** (and manual for mentor trainers—worked through across the year)

Peer Mentor's Handbook

- **Part One: Mentoring & Mentor Training**
- **Mentor Responsibilities**
- **Mentoring Contract**
- **Crises Situations!**
- **Hopes & Concerns**

Peer Mentor's Handbook (paralleling the curriculum content)

- **Part Two: Sharing Points of View**
- **Your Assertiveness Quotient (A/Q)**
- **Anger and Assertiveness**
- **Asking Assertively for What You Want**
- **“Rogerian” Listening**
Peer Mentor’s Handbook (paralleling the curriculum content)

- Part 3: Working With Different Points of View
- Your Style of Conflict Resolution
- Problem-Solving Steps
- Problem Solving Though Questions
- Finding alternatives
- Problem Pictures
- Four Goals of Misbehavior

Peer Mentor’s Handbook

- Part Two: Part Four: Motivating Your Mentee
- Trusting
- Positive Reinforcement
- Encouragement: Points to Remember
- Constructive Criticism
- Welcoming A Stranger
- Planning to Get Along
- Brainstorming Activities

Developing Connectedness: Summer Class Curriculum for Developmental Mentoring Program

Table of Contents

- Overview of “Developmental Curriculum”
- Description of “connectedness” to future selves, cultures, and others…
- Three-year cycle of connectedness themes
- How to use the curriculum..........................................................

3 Year Cycle: Summer Curricula

- Year One: Connectedness to self in the future
  - When I’m a parent. Using basic math functions (addition, subtraction, percentages, rounding, and averages) and problem solving techniques to determine a family budget.
- Year Two: Connectedness to culture
  - Folk tale comparison. Students choose two culturally different folk tales with similar plots to analyze. Once completed, the pairs will begin to compose a folk tale with a similar plot, but with culturally different elements
- Year Three: Connectedness to society
  - On the Road. Students to investigate and plan travel route to reach the destination of an end of week field trip. They will research best routes, type of transportation, and the sites that are located in route and around the destination.

CAMP Program Evaluation Tools and Toolkit

The Hemingway: Measure of Adolescent Connectedness (Karcher, 2003): Youth, parent, teacher versions (see www.schoolconnectedness.com)

Self-Esteem Questionnaire (DuBois, 1999)

Match Characteristics Questionnaire (Nakkula & Harris, in Karcher, Nakkula & Harris, 2005)

Social Interest Scale (Crandall, 1991) using 24 pairs of words, one of which is social: “helpful vs. quick witted.” (see www.highschoolbigs.org)

Attitudes Towards Youth (author unknown)

Promoting Mentors’ Connectedness

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance: Association between serving as mentor and changes in school-based outcomes were large, eta-squared .26.

Covariates: Age, sex, pre-test scores

Karcher (2009) Increases in… connectedness… Professional School Counseling 12(4)
Promoting Mentors’ Academic Self-Esteem

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance: Association between serving as mentor and changes in school-based outcomes were very large, eta-squared .26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Univariate F-test</th>
<th>Effect Size (partial η²)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular Self-Esteem</td>
<td>5.57***</td>
<td>.10 (large effect: d = .55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Self-Esteem</td>
<td>4.36**</td>
<td>.05 (medium effect: d = .44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Self-Esteem</td>
<td>4.25**</td>
<td>.05 (medium effect: d = .54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Dosage: But we must ensure attendance to “do no harm” to mentees

Despite positive program effects of CAMPs on mentees’ connectedness, the mentors’ absenteeism predicted declines in mentees’ self-esteem (e.g., physical appearance) & increased behaviors problems (teacher report).


Structure (Who): Select those highest in social interest to “do no harm”

Despite positive program effects for mentors, the more socially interested mentors chose to work with more challenging mentees and were more likely to return for a second year as a mentor.


Only BBBS HS Bigs with the most positive views of youth yielded impacts for the most at-risk mentees

Karcher, Davidson, Rhodes, & Herrera (under review)

Structure: Mentee training

Mentor-rated “mentees’ support seeking” and mentors’ self-efficacy strongly predicted mentors’ perceptions of relationship quality

Promote these through mentee orientations, mentor training, and appropriate program structure and supervision.

Train mentees to “seek support” and train mentors to value a strong relationship


Conclusions: What we still need to know about CAMPs

- **Structure:** How much training/support do teens need?
- **Goals:** Can CAMPs improve grades or prevent risk-taking? (Or is improved connectedness or self-esteem it?)
- **Content:** Developmental vs. Instrumental mentoring--for whom, to what ends, and curriculum-based or not?
- **Dosage:** What are the important (or minimally sufficient) program elements for CAMP mentees? What situations are too much for CAMP mentors to handle (what constitutes a potential over-dose)?

Summary I: The good

- Mentee’s in highly structured CAMPs have better outcomes than programs lacking structure.
- Mentors who feel efficacious tend to view the relationship positively, so they need training to appreciate what mentors provide their mentees.
- There is evidence that both mentors and mentees benefit from well-run programs that minimize opportunities for deviancy training.
Summary II: The bad and the ugly

• Although mentors reporting higher social interest chose more challenging mentees—the more academically and socially at risk youth—which is good; the more academically at risk their mentees were, the greater the decline mentors’ connectedness.

• Mentors’ absences contributed to declines of self-esteem, including “physical”—mentors’ absences, when chronic and unexplained, can make their mentees feel ugly.

• Programs providing little structure yield little impact.

Implications 1:

• Adolescent mentors may experience burnout when working with academically at risk mentees (BBBS SBM found same thing). They may turn to “tutoring” to feel they “know what they are doing” but may also struggle when trying to use academic activities.

• Youth who report a strong, positive view of youth, and a greater orientation towards being helpful, caring, and interested in others (i.e., social interest) may be best to recruit.

Implications 2:

Structure seems key—Biggest bang when:
1. a curriculum, youth (mentor involvement),
2. developmental and instrumental activities in tandem and planned,
3. high degrees of support and monitoring of mentors by staff, coupled with ongoing training
4. summer events, termination procedures, & matching “Meet and Greet” events
5. parent involvement.

Thank you

www.adolescentconnectedness.com
For free copies of the parent, teacher, and youth connectedness scales

Contact: michael.karcher@utsa.edu