



Mentoring Resource Center

FACT SHEET

In This Issue . . .

...we examine the role of “connectedness” in helping mentees grow and develop over time, and how mentoring programs can foster this critical trait.

The Pub Hub (beginning on page 7) features several new resources that you can borrow from our Lending Library, including new books on adolescent brain development, the provision of wrap-around services, and helping mentees find “sparks” that ignite their passion for learning.



Redefining Your Success: *The Role of Adolescent Connectedness in Demonstrating Mentoring Impact*

Mentoring programs are always looking for new and innovative ways to measure and demonstrate their success to funders, prospective volunteers, parents, and other community stakeholders. And while there are many ways of showing that youth, mentors, parents, and others enjoy participating in your program (satisfaction surveys, for example), formal program evaluations usually tend to focus on the ultimate sign of success: positive youth outcomes.

But who ultimately determines what meaningful youth outcomes are? For many programs, it is a funding source—a foundation or government grant—that defines what constitutes acceptable or valued youth outcomes. Obviously, funding sources want to be able to say that their investment in mentoring is achieving results for young people. But local programs may want to capture additional outcomes to round out the picture of all they have achieved.

For example, while your mentoring program’s Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) measures of improved academic performance, increased school attendance, and long-lasting matches are all important for school-based mentoring programs, chances are that most Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS) funded sites also address a wide range of other youth, school,

and community issues. In these situations, programs frequently put most of their evaluation energy into collecting data related to those grant-driven performance measures, while potentially overlooking other data that might more accurately capture their success.

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A good example of this can be found with the notion of “connectedness.” One prominent study of afterschool programs (Resnick et al., 1997) found that 73 percent of afterschool programs explicitly stated that one of their goals was to improve connectedness to family, peers, or the school. But only half of these programs were using a tool to measure connectedness as part of their program evaluation. That means half of the sites were not looking for evidence of the one thing they said they were trying to accomplish.

Similarly, almost all mentoring programs aim to provide the mentee with “connections,” not only with a mentor, but also to other school, community, and career supports. Almost every OSDFS mentoring grantee is hoping to help their mentees experience connections to others. Unfortunately, the GPRA measures reported by programs are unrelated to this stated, shared goal. Programs are encouraged to report other site-specific data on their progress, but it is unknown how many are using a standardized instrument to measure changes in connectedness among their mentees. Even the recent formal evaluation of the initiative by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) asked only a few questions related to mentees’ relationships with others, instead focusing the bulk of the evaluation on examining mentee grades and risk-taking behaviors (Bernstein, Dun Rappaport, Olsho, Hunt, & Levin, 2009).

This *Fact Sheet* examines the important role that connectedness plays in mentoring relationships and outcomes, and highlights an innovative tool you can use to measure this quality in the youth you serve. It can be a valuable aspect of your evaluation strategy, redefining

your success and perhaps focusing some of your annual data collection on the very thing you do best.

What Is Connectedness?

When discussing adolescent connectedness, many different terms come up: bonding, attachment, belonging, and closeness are all terms that try to capture how well a young person relates to the world around her. Historically, connectedness (and these related terms) has focused on the youth’s perceptions of how well she is connected to others. “I feel like my teacher cares about me.” “I have many friends in my neighborhood.” “My parents give me support.”

But a new definition of connectedness is beginning to emerge. For our purposes here, connectedness is defined as the outward expression of positive feelings and the seeking of support from people and places. Under this definition, connectedness is active, not passively received by the young person. It is not enough to feel as if teachers care about you—the real question is: Are you turning to them for support? Do these feelings of caring or belonging lead you to take action and engage the person or place? This way of looking at connectedness emphasizes the reciprocal nature of human connections, the mutual and ecological aspects of how we interact with others to improve our lives.

This theory of connectedness builds on two important principles from the world of self-psychology (Kohut, 1977; Kohut & Wolf, 1978). The first principle is that self-development, our growth as people, is dependent on the experience of receiving attention, praise, and empathy in our personal relationships. These experiences validate our sense of self. The second principle is the experience of being in a relationship with someone we admire, someone we view as “competent, protecting, and consistent.” When these two experiences are combined—when someone we view as significant in our lives provides us with attention, praise, and empathy—it increases our ability to do this for ourselves. In this way, young people learn to praise and value themselves, with the positive social interactions leading to positive internal changes. This is a critical aspect of the development of self in all young people (Karcher, 2005).

Looking at these themes—praise and attention provided through a meaningful relationship with a valued, caring adult—we can see the essence of youth mentoring. We nurture young people so they can develop and

learn to nurture themselves. Connectedness, defined in this way, gets to the heart of how youth perceive their world, and more important, how they build on those perceptions to support themselves. Connectedness in this sense is not dependent on an internal personal trait, but is something that can be changed, improved, nurtured. And that speaks directly to the work your mentors do every day.

Why Does Connectedness Matter?

In addition to the developmental impact noted above, connectedness is a powerful way of understanding a young person's chances for a successful future. Higher connectedness, especially to teachers and the school itself, has been found to contribute to higher academic performance (Karcher, 2009). Programs that can increase mentees' school connectedness are more likely to see positive academic gains.

Given the short duration of matches in school-based mentoring programs, it makes sense to measure a quality like connectedness, rather than look solely for immediate grade improvement or higher test scores. A mentoring relationship is unlikely to have an impact on this year's grades, but if the mentor can increase his mentee's connectedness over time, especially the "seeking support" aspects, then that mentee is better positioned to start improving at school. The recent IES evaluation (Bernstein et al., 2009) mostly looked for grade improvement and other traditional academic gains after an average of only 5.8 months of mentoring, finding, unfortunately, no significant impacts. Perhaps more thoroughly examining increases in the connectedness of mentees would have provided evidence of the potential for future academic improvements.

Connectedness is also a great predictor of risk-taking behaviors. It has specifically been used to accurately predict levels of violence and substance abuse among youth. It is a critical aspect of prevention work in these areas: a large-scale study of substance abuse programs found that those that fostered connectedness with adults and peers made by far the most impact (Springer et al., 2004). Connectedness has also been found to correlate with self-esteem, resiliency, protective factors, social interest, and school attitude (Karcher, 2005). Conversely, disconnection (low levels of connectedness) is correlated with negative circumstances, such as academic underachievement,

depression, and increased risk factors and risk-taking behavior.

Ironically, high connectedness in some areas, such as connectedness to one's neighborhood, is not always a good thing. If the neighborhood is not a good one, this connectedness may actually indicate that the young person is getting praise and attention and is developing relationships with negative influences, rather than positive ones.

Another reason connectedness matters for mentoring programs...

Connectedness is also a prominent part of positive youth development theory. It is one of the "5 Cs" of youth development, along with caring, competency, confidence, and character. To learn more about how connectedness fits in with youth development principles, and with mentoring programs, please see these previous MRC Fact Sheets:

- Fact Sheet 13: Understanding the Youth Development Model
- Fact Sheet 14: Putting Youth Development Principles To Work in Mentoring Programs
- Fact Sheet 15: A Mentor's Guide to Youth Development

These can all be downloaded on the MRC Web site at: <http://www.edmentoring.org/publications.html>

Because connectedness predicts or correlates to so many other behaviors and youth assets, it is a reliable indicator of how your mentees are developing in your program and how well positioned they are for future success and struggles. If you need to make the case to a funder that your program is having a real impact, connectedness can be a powerful statistic.

Connectedness also matters for mentoring programs because it is one of the few things about your mentees that is malleable. The qualities of their neighborhood,

their home life, and their school are all fairly static and beyond your program's control. But the way mentees perceive and act on their connectedness to people and places can be nurtured and shaped through the support of a mentor. Because connectedness is defined as knowing, valuing, and seeking sources of support, not as some inherent personal or environmental trait, it is one of the best things for a mentoring program to strive to affect.

It is also a concept that can ground your program in reality. Far too often, mentoring programs try to impact areas of a young person's life that might be unrealistic. For example, improved grades and test scores require not just a caring mentor, but also a functional school, quality teachers, a positive home environment, access to educational resources, and many other factors that are well beyond a mentoring program's control. By focusing on an intermediate outcome like connectedness, one that indicates the likelihood of other positive outcomes, mentoring programs can focus their signs of success on what they do best: providing a type of support that helps the young person learn how to support themselves. This is the best place to focus your time and energy when evaluating your program.

How Can Programs Measure Connectedness?

Luckily, there is an innovative free tool available that can help you measure changes in connectedness among your youth participants. The Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness was designed specifically for use by mentoring programs and other similar youth interventions. It was developed by Dr. Michael Karcher of the University of Texas-San Antonio in response to what he saw as an incomplete set of measures currently in use. The Hemingway measure emphasizes the relationship and support-seeking aspects of connectedness, providing real data about how your mentees are engaging with the world around them and how they are internalizing those experiences.

The Hemingway (<http://www.adolescentconnectedness.com>) is free to download and use, although Dr. Karcher asks that you send him an anonymous data set (with youth identifiers removed) so that he can

continue his research on its use. The instrument itself is a youth survey, available in both a long and short version. It is designed for youth in grades 6–12, with a separate survey also available for college-age participants. It is available in English, Spanish, French, and Chinese. An implementation manual and complete scoring guides are also free to download.

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The Hemingway consists of four main categories, or scales: being social (friends), being academic (school), being related (family), and becoming (self). Additional scales examine connectedness to reading, neighborhood, and religion. Within these major scales are 15 subscales that look at specific aspects of the main areas (see sidebar on next page for a listing).

The instrument combines three types of questions: cognition (is the youth aware of supports), conduct (does the youth seek out supports), and caring (does the youth sense mutual caring from these supports). These three question types work together to paint a full picture of the nature of the young person's connectedness.

Best of all, the Hemingway scale has been fully tested for reliability and validity, meaning that it is a proven tool that is not subject to bias or other problems that can lead to meaningless data. As such, it can be a powerful tool for understanding the youth you serve.

The survey is commonly given to mentees when they enter a mentoring program or at the beginning of the school year. Programs then administer it again at the end of the year or when a mentee leaves the program. The questions can also be inserted into any other evaluation instruments or surveys, making it easier to collect all the data you need at once.

This pre-post survey and analysis allows you to measure the changes that participating in your program

15 Ecological Subscales of the Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness

1. Neighborhood
2. Friends
3. Self in the Present
4. Parents
5. Siblings
6. School
7. Peers
8. Teachers
9. Self in the Future
10. Reading
11. Youth from Other Cultures
12. Religion
13. Romantic Partners
14. Mother
15. Father

As you can see, the instrument collects information on a wide variety of categories. This allows you to find very specific areas in which youth might not be as well connected as they should be, allowing for more targeted mentor support.

has over time. Positive gains in connectedness from your program, gains that predict a whole range of other positive youth outcomes, are compelling evidence for funders and other stakeholders that your program is effecting meaningful change in young people and providing a considerable return on their investment.

The survey results can also indicate gaps in your mentees' worlds that your program can more purposefully try to fill. For example, if you find that your mentees feel quite connected to their school, but not their families, you can then direct mentors to emphasize conversations about family life or implement strategies to involve parents more in program activities.

Next Steps

In addition to measuring connectedness among your mentees, take the time to think about the other things you are measuring as part of your evaluation. Do they capture what you do? Are you measuring the most important goals you have for the program? What other data might accurately reflect the actual impact you are having? Forget funder requirements for a moment and think about the logic model that drives your program. What is it you want to be different in the youth you serve? What is the true focus of your mentoring relationships? What is your overall mentoring philosophy? If you are not measuring anything related to that philosophy, it's time to find some tools, such as the Hemingway, which can give you the information you need to prove your success.

See the additional reading and resources below for more information on evaluating your program.

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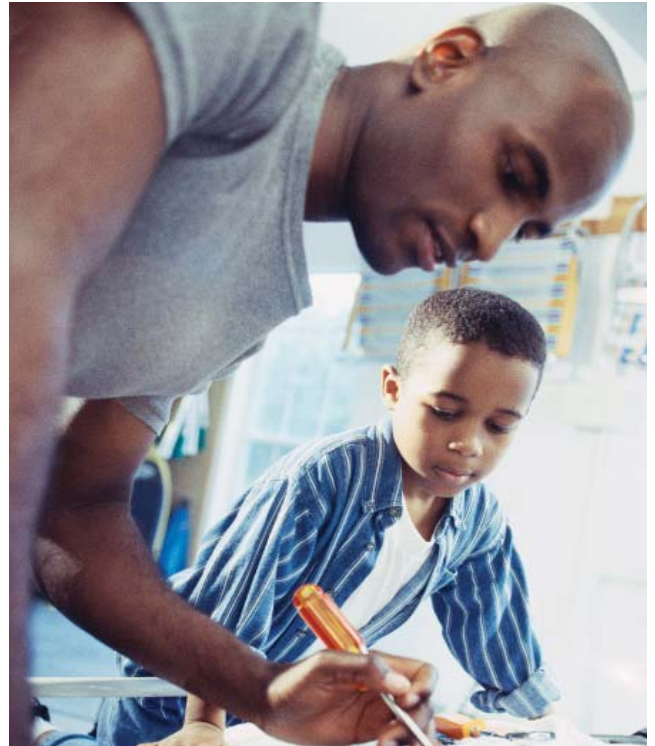
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Additional Reading and Resources

- The Hemingway tool and all associated manuals and scoring instructions can be found online at: <http://www.adolescentconnectedness.com>
- If you need to freshen up on the basic principles of program evaluation, especially in how to better align program activities and program evaluation tools, please see the MRC handout *Frequently Asked Questions About Research and Evaluation* at: http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/ws2_supplement2.pdf
- We provided a brief overview of several ready-to-use evaluation tools (including the Hemingway) in the “Pub Hub” section of the May 2008 MRC Fact Sheet: <http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet20.pdf>



- Among the many other resources on connectedness, particularly to schools:

School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth (2009, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) — <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyYouth/AdolescentHealth/connectedness.pdf>

School Connectedness: Improving the Lives of Students (2005, Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health) — <http://cecp.air.org/download/MCMonograph-FINAL.pdf>

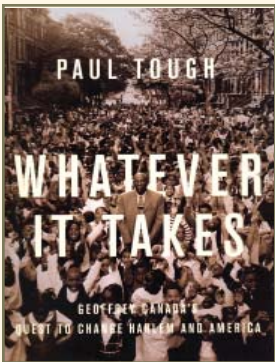
School Connectedness and Meaningful Student Participation (2009, U.S. Department of Education) — <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/connect/index.html>

The Pub Hub

A Look at Publications and Tools You Can Use!

In this issue of the PubHub we examine several new resources your program can borrow from the MRC Lending Library. These resources cover a wide range of topics, including the provision of wrap-around services to support youth, understanding child brain development, and innovative strategies for sparking youth interests.

Please contact Michael Garringer (garringm@nwrel.org) or Kay Logan (logank@nwrel.org) if you have questions about searching the collection or borrowing items.



Whatever it Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America by Paul Tough, 2008, Houghton Mifflin Company.

After years of designing and running successful programs serving youth in Harlem, Geoffrey Canada had become discouraged by the long waiting lists for his programs, the continuing tussles with public

school administrators over time and space, and, most importantly, the way successes often evaporated for the kids after their participation in his programs ended. His response to these challenges was to dramatically rethink the very nature of how youth would be supported by his programs. Instead of "heroic interventions aimed at individual kids," he decided to try serving all of the children in a neighborhood in Harlem with a complete net of wrap-around services extending from birth through college. He named his reconceived project the Harlem Children's Zone, and designated a 24-block service area as a starting point.

Ten years later, the Zone has grown to cover 100 blocks and provides services to 7,400 children and their families, including health prevention, early childhood education, a charter school, and a wide spectrum of other programs. This book gives a first hand look at both the successes and challenges faced by the project, which has become a central focus in a national debate on the effective delivery of youth services and the very nature of generational poverty. The book paints a compelling portrait of both the children and parents of the Zone and of Geoffrey Canada himself, as he translates his childhood experiences growing up in urban poverty into a vision that the Obama administration is considering replicating in 20 cities across the United States. Mentoring programs working in high poverty, urban settings will find this book to be especially valuable.

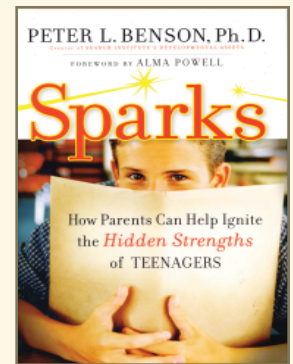
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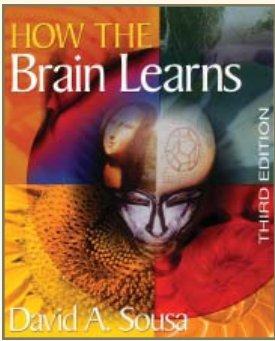
Sparks: How Parents Can Help Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers by Peter L. Benson, 2008, Jossey-Bass.

This book focuses on ways that adults can help teenagers discover their unique gifts, the so-called "sparks" that inspire and motivate them to succeed. Sparks was authored by Peter Benson, the director and lead researcher of the Search Institute, who was central to the development of the Institute's influential framework of the 40 Developmental Assets. Although it is written for parents, much of the material here is easily adaptable for mentoring programs.

Benson starts with an in-depth look at what teens and parents can tell us about "sparks." To explore this, the Search Institute conducted thousands of surveys and interviews with teens and parents. Among many interesting findings, was that teens most often look to the creative arts for their inspiration. In fact, they choose the arts almost two to one over sports, the next highest rated spark, which should be affirming to mentoring programs that include art activities. But what about the many youth who don't yet know their sparks? And how can adults help to identify and nurture sparks in these youth? Toward this objective, Benson creates a teen self-assessment tool and a series of discussion questions. Once sparks are identified, the book explains how adults and teens can work together to nurture them. There are all sorts of planning checklists, inspirational stories, tips for working with teens, and an annotated resource list (of books, films, and Web sites) included here—plenty of material to inspire both youth and adults.

Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singleresource.asp?id=18055&DB=res>





How the Brain Learns, 3rd Edition by David A. Sousa, 2006, Corwin Press.

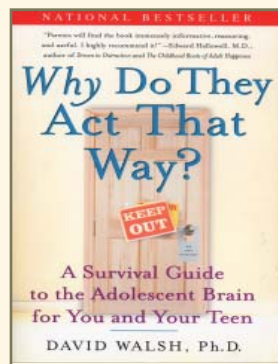
This useful resource examines research on child brain development and translates it into effective strategies for helping children learn. Primarily written for teachers, this book will also be valuable for mentors and parents who want an accessible

introduction to the subject. It makes for engaging reading, explaining how the brain processes and retains information, how we create and access memories, and specific types of learning, such as the development of reading and math skills. Specific chapters also examine gender-specific brain development, arts education, effective teaching, and other many other issues related to learning.

Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singleresource.asp?id=18019&DB=res>

Why Do They Act That Way: A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen by David Walsh, 2004, Simon & Schuster.

This resource looks at brain development from a different perspective: a teenager's social and emotional behavior. The book includes numerous real-life examples that will be familiar to anyone who works with youth. Chapters explain why adolescents are sometimes impulsive, the psychobiology of drug use, gender differences, teen sleep patterns, and many other interesting topics. Useful tools are included throughout, including sample dialogues to help teens and parents talk, as well as tip sheets and even behavioral contracts. Most of these tools are geared toward parents, but could prove useful to mentoring programs if adapted for mentor training or use in mentoring relationships.



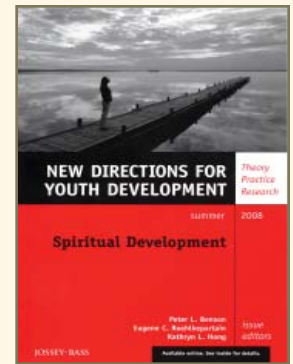
Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singleresource.asp?id=18000&DB=res>

Also of note...

In case you missed it a few months back, several of the major researchers in the youth mentoring field have released **Strengthening Mentoring Opportunities for At-Risk Youth**, a policy brief aimed at helping the youth mentoring movement address many of the challenges to its long-term success moving forward. Written by Timothy Cavell (Univ. of Arkansas), David DuBois (Univ. of Illinois at Chicago), Michael Karcher (Univ. of Texas at San Antonio), Thomas Keller (Portland State Univ.), and Jean Rhodes (Univ. of Massachusetts–Boston), the goal of the brief is to start a dialogue among mentoring researchers and practitioners about what the mentoring movement needs to keep growing as a key youth development strategy. You can download the brief at: http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/mentoring_policy_brief.pdf.

New Directions for Youth Development: Spiritual Development edited by Peter L. Benson, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, and Kathryn L. Hong, 2008, Jossey-Bass.

In this issue of the thought-provoking periodical *New Directions for Youth Development*, several researchers take a broad swipe at creating a framework for understanding how spirituality develops in youth. Drawing on the research and efforts of the Search Institute's Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, this resource takes on some big questions. For example, is there a way that research can give us insight into how youth come to terms with issues of meaning, purpose and identity in their lives? What role does spirituality play in a young person's ability to navigate difficult life challenges? How do youth-serving organizations grapple with issues surrounding religion? Should youth-serving organizations be intentional in including programming that promotes and nurtures spiritual development, and if so, how can they accomplish this and still respect the many different religious and spiritual beliefs of the children they serve?



This resource is just a first step toward examining these questions, but it is very interesting as a resource for engendering a deeper dialog about spirituality as a protective factor for youth. The majority of the issue is taken up by a section on "promising practices," including such wide-ranging subjects as rites of passage for youth, service-learning and forums for youth discussion of spiritual issues. There is even a chapter devoted specifically to youth mentoring and spiritual development written by Jean Rhodes, one of the mentoring field's most prominent researchers.

Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singleresource.asp?id=17993&DB=res>

OSDFS Announces 2009 National Conference

The Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS) has announced their 2009 National Conference, to be held August 3–5 in National Harbor, MD (located just outside of DC). OSDFS-funded mentoring programs should plan on attending this event, as it is part of the conference attendance required to be included in program budgets. Any questions about attending this event should be directed to your program's OSDFS Project Officer.

The 2009 OSDFS National Conference theme is "The Power of Change: Healthy Students, Safe Schools, and Engaged Communities." Conference goals include:

- Highlighting information from research and evaluation studies that will support State and local officials in assessing needs, establishing priorities, and selecting the most effective programs and strategies.
- Examining new trends, innovative approaches, and comprehensive, integrated strategies that may offer new approaches to both old and emerging problems and challenges.
- Enabling participants to build upon skills and receive training from practitioners in the fields of emergency management; health, mental health, and physical education; alcohol, drug, and violence prevention; civic and character education; and other areas related to school- and community-based prevention.

You can learn more about the conference and how to register at the official website at:
<http://www.osdfsnationalconference.com/>

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U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center
 771 Oak Avenue Parkway, Suite 2
 Folsom, CA 95630
 MRC Hotline: 1 (877) 579-4788, fax: (916) 983-6693
 E-mail: edmentoring@emt.org
 Web: <http://www.edmentoring.org>

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U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center
 771 Oak Avenue Parkway, Suite 2
 Folsom, CA 95630