TEACH[R]

Mentoring for impact

Brad Watson
Lecturer, Faculty of Arts/Humanities, Avondale College, NSW

Peter Kilgour
Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Avondale College, NSW

Abstract

School based mentoring (SBM) is an increasingly popular component of pastoral care programs in Australian secondary schools. Concurrent with growing consensus over the benefits of SBM, there is increasing recognition that the benefits of SBM can be maximised through careful programming, appropriate benchmarking and effective evaluation. Although children spend approximately 40% of their waking hours in school, and SBM is increasingly common, there is surprisingly little data available on the effectiveness of SBM. This paper reports on research into a mentoring program that links undergraduate theology students to teenage students in a secondary school. While the mentoring program was of value to both mentors and mentees, interviews with participants point to the value of aligning the program with guidelines for best practice found in the Australian National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks, 2007.

> *"The impact of mentoring is substantial, especially when mentors adopt a non-judgemental, advocate approach that is based on a positive relationship"*

Introduction

For the purpose of this paper mentoring is defined as a range of activities designed "to provide a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee" (Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2007, p. 13). Implicit in this definition is the premise that the primary beneficiary (mentee) is a young person who is assisted through personalised guidance and support in an organised program which links them to a supportive change agent (mentor).

As the author of *Boy Oh Boy: How to Raise and Educate Boys*, Tim Hawkes (2001) notes that the word 'mentor' is used in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. Written in Greek, approximately eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, the poem describes the responsibility given to a nobleman whose task it was to care for the son of the great Odysseus (otherwise known as Ulysses), a hero of the Trojan War who took ten adventurous years to return to his homeland. In Odysseus's absence, Mentor coached, guarded and guided Telemanchus (his mentee), befriending the fatherless young man, sharing his wisdom to guide his ward's career and personal development. Mentor may be seen as a wise facilitator who used both formal and informal opportunities to deliberately encourage, support and develop the potential of his mentee through a proactive, supportive relationship.

School based mentoring (SBM) activities are of particular interest to pastoral care staff, administrators and school counsellors. While the impacts of community mentoring programs are well researched, SBM outcomes are less understood, especially for mentees (Jucovy, 2000, p. 1). Research findings on the impacts of mentoring have been contradictory and public perceptions of SBM are largely informed by research conducted on community mentoring programs and a small number of SBM research projects. Rhodes (2008, p. 41) notes that, "the field of youth mentoring has taken on a public life of its own—a life that is, at times, removed from the scientific evidence". SBM can and should be viewed as a social phenomenon that requires careful study. Despite the presumption that all SBM activities are useful, some SBM programs may be poorly planned, poorly run and may lack evidence of impact.

Especially in school settings, where most students interact with adults in a relatively impersonal context, the impact of mentoring on individuals is widely perceived to be substantial, especially when mentors adopt a non-judgemental, advocate approach that is based on a positive relationship. In one study of 82 mentor/mentee pairs, most of the 24 mentors whose match failed "had a belief that they should and could 'reform' their mentee" (Jucovy, 2001, p. 1). Various researchers cited by MacCallum and Beltman (1999, p. 17) suggest that youth exposed to mentoring relationships benefit in terms of school attendance, school retention, progression to tertiary study, academic performance, self-confidence, self-efficacy, motivation, relationship with peers and family, problem solving skills and role modelling. In

a study of 53 Australian pilot indigenous mentoring programs the key outcomes identified were improved school attendance, strengthened participation in school activities, improved dialogue between Aboriginal families and community, and improved connections to the broader community (MacCullum, Beltman & Palmer, 2005, p. 6).

Although SBM research is still in its infancy, common areas of inquiry include effective length of mentoring matches, frequency of meetings, training and support, characteristics of effective mentors and impact on mentees (Grossman, 2009, p. 4). Research consistently points to the importance of long duration mentoring, maximising frequency of meetings, development of an emotional bond between mentor and mentee, and utilisation of a personal empowerment approach (Deutsch and Spencer, 2009). SBM is said to enjoy particular advantages over community based mentoring programs including increased appeal to mentors (reduced time commitments combined with increased personal security), strong referral systems for mentees (largely because teachers refer students to the program), enhanced potential for cross-gender mentoring and reduced costs (Jucovy, 2000, p. 1).

Advocacy for SBM is varied and proponents range from those who report small or moderate benefits to others who provide strong endorsement. The USA Arizona Governor's Office for Children, Youth and Families (2005, p. 10) reported that although only 2% of Arizona's youth were in a mentoring relationship, youth with mentors were 52% less likely to skip school, 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 37% less likely to skip a class, 32% less likely to hit someone, 27% less likely to begin using alcohol. Further, the commission posits that in the school based mentoring programs it investigated, youth were more confident, more positive about relationships and had better attitudes. Converse and Lignugaris/Kraft (2008) compared sixteen at-risk students mentored by staff to a control group of unmentored at-risk students and reported significant changes in attitudes of mentored individuals toward self, peers, teachers, and other school personnel. One study of high risk youth (often the mentees had a criminal record) found that mentoring "acted as a barrier against depression, which in turn had an effect on how the youth handled social conflicts, substance use and recidivism" (Bauldry, n.d., p. 18). It should be noted that the impact of SBM on mentors themselves is rarely researched however many researchers concur with the finding that mentors enjoy developing relationships and may experience "enhanced personal development and self-esteem" (MacCullum et al. 2005, p.6).

A study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters SBM program offered in USA schools is indicative of the benefits commonly reported for students. Researchers studied a total of 1,139 nine- to sixteen-year-olds in 71 participating schools. From this sample, 565 youth were randomly assigned to a beneficiary group from whom baseline data was collected and 574 assigned to the control group. The researchers found that mentoring resulted in improved academic performance, specifically in science and language, quality of class work, number of assignments handed in, number of serious school infractions, scholastic efficacy, and school attendance. Although there appeared to be significant benefits attached to the social connectedness provided by the mentoring program, the researchers did not discover any benefits in terms of "out-of-school drug and alcohol use, misconduct outside of school, peer and parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem" (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007, p. 68–69). Given the variation in outcomes observed for mentees in the various studies cited above, it may be that mentoring outcomes are affected by a variety of factors including mentor traits and training, the type and quality of programs offered, and the mentees themselves.

Reid (2008) notes that successful mentoring is dependent on the preparation of the program, attention to detail, and level of reflection conducted by the mentors. Training of mentors is essential. She says that if implemented well, "some learnable behaviours can improve complex interpersonal interactions. Mentoring programs do not need to rely only on participants' instincts as they negotiate difficult social waters" (p. 52). Interestingly, Converse and Lignugaris/Kraft (2008) speculate that mentors who are more informal and playful, and rely less on planned activities or icebreakers, are more successful in establishing a mutually enjoyable relationship associated with tangible outcomes.

Hughes and Dykstra (2008) researched the perceptions university students had of the mentoring program they voluntarily participated in. Their work revealed that: "Mentors were motivated primarily by the opportunity to have a positive impact on youth through (a) being a role model, friend, source of support, and caring adult, and (b) increasing their own understanding" (p. 21). Such motivators may be congruent with those of the mentors in the study, which is the focus of this paper.

> ***"Mentors who are more informal and playful are more successful in establishing a mutually enjoyable relationship associated with tangible outcomes"***

Methodology

The SBM program evaluated in this study is offered to high school mentees aged 14–16 from a Seventh-day Adventist school who are linked to

undergraduate theology students over a period of just 10 weeks. As such this program is thought to be the only one of its kind in Australia. The mentors are typically aged between 20 and 45, are usually male, and participate in the mentoring program as a course requirement. Of the 13 mentors interviewed, the mean age was 28. The program coordinator, a chaplain at the institution that provides the mentors, coordinates pre-mentoring training totalling 4 hours. Given the short duration of the program, and the overwhelming weight of evidence collected on SBM programs, the researchers approached the task of evaluating the impact of the program with some scepticism regarding the impact on both mentors and mentees.

In the context of other programs run in Australian schools, the SBM program studied in this paper is in keeping with the descriptor provided in the Australian National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks (Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2007) which asserts that:

> School based mentoring takes place at the mentees' school either during school hours or immediately after. School based programs often target students at risk of leaving school early or who are socially isolated or failing to achieve their potential. Activities may include tutoring, career exploration, playing games or sports. The primary focus is the development of a long-term supportive relationship. (p. 13)

"School based programs often target students at risk of leaving school early or who are socially isolated or failing to achieve their potential. The primary focus is the development of a long-term supportive relationship"

The school mentees participate voluntarily and are initially selected for program involvement by the Head of School, in consultation with staff. Some mentees are considered to be 'vulnerable' (from a single parent family, socially isolated or in trouble at school) while other students are referred by staff on the basis that they would benefit from social networking in order to develop leadership skills. Interestingly, the matching process utilised is very flexible. Rather than pre-match mentees to mentors, the two groups are placed in a room together, with food, and instructed to form their own mentor-mentee partnerships, typically involving one mentor and one mentee. Activities include informal discussion, review of events or happenings in the life of the mentee, game playing, singing, sports and icebreaking tasks.

Formal mentor-mentee interaction is limited to one semester of academic activity incorporating four hours of mentor training and ten weeks mentoring. The program has been offered since 2006 and currently utilises the Adventist Development and Relief Agency BSomebody2Someone Mentoring Training Series resource (French & Unser, 2007). There is an expectation that mentees will benefit from the 'connection' achieved through improved social networking, that is "A sense of belonging; of feeling like you 'fit'; of knowing that people know you, and believe in you" (p. 13, module 5). The mentor coordinator noted that the main goal for mentors is to "*Get them focussed on the powerful ministry they can have with kids, and build their confidence. It's a very intentional method of introducing mentoring to the SDA Church*."

The mentoring program is best seen as a loosely designed, relatively informal, short-term intervention designed to impact both mentors and mentees. Anecdotal evidence provided by school staff and mentee feedback sheets collected by the program coordinator strongly suggested positive outcomes of the program and a consequent need for review and evaluation to deepen impact. For example, all 26 (100%) mentees who completed feedback sheets in 2009 stated that the mentoring was a positive experience. However, 16 (42%) added that the program was too short.

Effective evaluation of mentoring activities usually necessitates a thorough understanding of the desired program outcomes, use of appropriate informants, employment of suitably nuanced data gathering/analysis mechanisms and ideally, comparison to a control group (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). The activities of the authors of this paper however can be seen as more in keeping with rapid appraisal techniques of data gathering incorporating a preliminary 'case study' that utilises coded transcripts of recorded focus group discussions, and interviews utilising the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach (Davis, 2005) in which participants identify the most important consequence of an intervention. The MSC approach requires participants in an intervention to 'story' the most significant impact for them. This study used no control group for comparison and took place seven months after the program ended. Rather than being viewed as a systemic attempt to measure the impacts of a program (MacCullum & Beltman, 1999, p. 17), the data gathered could be seen as an exploratory study that is best used to stimulate discussion on the need for Mentoring Benchmarks and their relevance to small SBM programs.

Results

Focus group interviews involved 13 male mentors who were randomly assigned to one of three discussion sessions of about one hour, at which time they were also invited to write an MSC statement. Individual interviews were also conducted with two program coordinators. A focus group discussion involving seven Year 10 mentees was also conducted however the number of participants was limited by the fact that some had left school, and many of those invited to participate either declined the opportunity to

meet with researchers in their lunch break, or failed to gain and submit parental consent. Fortunately a written feedback sheet had been completed in late 2009 by 26 mentees and 22 mentors (French, 2009). A thematic analysis of the coded interview transcripts and feedback sheets yielded observations from both mentors and mentees about the program.

Mentees

As a discussion starter the mentees were asked to respond to a simple five question survey in which each statement required mentees to respond using a five point Likert Scale where 5 was the most favourable response and 1 was the least favourable. For example, students who responded to "I enjoyed the company of the mentors" could circle 1 (not really) or 5 (very much). Table 1 shows the questions asked and the mean response score for the students. The mean response for question 1 was 4.57, indicating a very strong level of satisfaction with the company of the mentors. Evidence for a positive relationship was supported by 25 of the 26 students reporting in student feedback sheets a perception that their mentor liked them.

It can be seen from the mean of 4.43 for both questions 3 and 4 that the students involved in the mentoring program considered it to be a positive social learning experience. Students strongly recommended participation by other classes in the future ($M = 4.86$). Feedback sheets confirmed this with all 26 mentees asserting that they would recommend it to others.

The mentee focus group discussion solicited positive responses, even though they came in short, concise sentences. The researcher began by asking the mentees if the program should happen again. The result was a unanimous "*yes*" from the group with one "*definitely*" heard. Mentees were then queried why they were so positive about the program. This brought answers of more substance including: "*It was fun*", "*getting to know more people*", "*we learned new skills*", "*helping other people out*". One student expressed satisfaction in missing a science class however noted that the mentoring sessions were deliberately rotated to minimise impact on particular subjects. Feedback sheets resulted in comments such as "*It relaxes you to talk to someone*", "*it was fun and it was good to meet people*", "*it's really positive*", "*I made friends*", "*I had something to look forward to each week*" and it "*takes you in so many positive directions*".

The boys interviewed tended to be very economical with their words. When asked to describe exactly what they did with their mentors, one responded, "*Sometimes everyone would just play a game of footy or soccer or cricket*". Generally, they talked about the games and the music they participated in individually, and as a group with their mentors, but then indicated that they had discussed issues with their mentors and talked to them about "*things that were going down*". They indicated unanimously that this was helpful for them and that their mentors were good listeners.

Table 1: Mean responses from mentees

Item	Statement	Mean response (n=7)
1	I enjoyed the company of the mentors.	4.57
2	I still think about my mentors.	3.14
3	Having the mentors visit made a positive difference to my day.	4.43
4	I learned things from my mentor.	4.43
5	I would recommend the mentoring process for future classes.	4.86

The boys' ideas on how the program could be improved were also expressed with a degree of brevity. They wanted the program to continue for them and to have it expanded so that others could benefit as well, including the girls who had little opportunity to participate due to the small number of female mentors. Four of the seven focus group participants stated that although the official mentoring project had ended, they were still in touch with their mentors via email, phone or other means. One piece of mentee advice that resonated with the entire group was, "*Instead of one period make it two or three*". By contrast, only 13 of the 26 mentee feedback sheets (50%) indicated that the high school students wanted more time each week with their mentor, that one hour was less than ideal.

When asked to identify the most significant change in their lives as a consequence of participating in the mentoring program, the mentees commented that it had been simply having someone outside of friends and family to talk to. In the absence of teacher observations, infringement data, school attendance records and academic records, it was not possible for the researchers to draw any conclusions about the long term impact of the program on student academic performance or behaviour. A review of the 26 mentee feedback sheets reveals that mentees especially appreciated the opportunity to network socially (n=19), have fun (n=10), talk and have questions answered (n=8), and miss class (n=6).

"One student expressed satisfaction in missing a science class however noted that the mentoring sessions were deliberately rotated to minimise impact on particular subjects"

Mentors

Given that the thirteen male mentors interviewed had all agreed to participate in the research, and were not randomly selected from the entire cohort of 25 mentors who participated in the program in 2009, it is possible that their experiences do not provide a representative sample. Indeed, mentors who had negative experiences may have excluded themselves from the research activity and both of the female mentors declined to participate in the three focus group discussions. However, given that 13 participated in focus group discussion from a total of 25 mentors (52%), the researchers are confident that the cohort is reasonably represented.

A summary of shared motivation for participation in this SBM, as offered by one mentor, suggested,

> *It was more [about] just being a mate, listening to them if they've got problems...yeah just [to] give them a bit of edification, bring them up if they are down, if they are happy see where they are at...if possible just to relate ummm, personal experience.*

This holistic finding is in agreement with earlier research, supporting this as a significant motivator for tertiary student mentors (Hughes and Dykstra, 2008).

The observations below combine findings from focus group discussion, MSC statements and comments from 22 mentor feedback sheets collected in 2009. A summary of the outcomes for the mentors results in eight specific themes and a brief discussion of each follows.

> ***Focus group discussion frequently resulted in the observation by mentors that the experience had changed their own perception of youth ministry and built their confidence in interacting with youth***

Most mentors expressed **moderate to high degrees of satisfaction** with their participation in the program, asserting that they were adequately trained and personally enriched through their involvement. In the words of one mentor "*I didn't expect to enjoy it as much as I did, by the end of the program I didn't want it to end*". Most mentors, with the exception of one who seemed unable to find anything in common with his mentee, expressed such sentiments. A strong appreciation of the experience was revealed on 20 of the 22 mentor feedback sheets.

In focus group discussion mentors consistently argued, sometimes quite passionately, that it would be far better to **match with mentees over a longer period of time**. All of the three mentor focus groups agreed that while the program was beneficial, greater impact would be expected through longer engagement. While one mentor stated, "*I was surprised to see how much of a dent one can make in such a short period of time—the kids were very responsive*", the remainder questioned the brevity of the program. Another asserted, "*Too short. By the time you build up a strong relationship it was over.*" One focus group recommended extension to at least one year, and expressed interest in matches for up to four years. Clearly, "*Ten weeks is not enough to meet someone off the bat and talk about deep stuff*". From the feedback sheets, 50% indicated dissatisfaction with the short duration of the formal matching.

In focus group discussion several mentors revealed, quiet candidly, amusement over their own **vulnerability and misgivings prior to matching** with a mentee. Some of the older mentors had strongly doubted their ability to connect with teenagers, a sentiment shared by many of the relatively younger mentors. Several described real nervousness and fear of rejection by their potential mentees, followed by relief when they were matched. Mentors reported anxiety of different degrees as shown in the following comment, "*I just thought I would be [the] last one picked. And I just didn't think it was going to be a good experience at all.*"

Mentors highlighted **the need for informative matching** so that mentors and mentees could form matches based on common interests. This was expressed in the statement, "*I think it is just as simple as doing a basic questionnaire, just a five point questionnaire, ehm, on just their musical tastes, their sports interests, what their fields of interests are, in hobbies or ambitions*". Those who found common interests reported benefits such as connecting more easily and finding common grounds for conversation, however this occurred more by chance than by design in this program.

Significantly, most of the mentors were **reluctant to speculate on the lasting impacts** of their activities with the mentees. No mentor interviewed described evidence of change in their mentees, perhaps reflecting the relatively short duration of the program. Indicative of group sentiment was the statement, "*I felt the program was a great initiative but didn't think the time given was sufficient to make an impact on their lives*". Impact related comments tended to focus on observations that the mentees were appreciative and could be surprisingly open, and that some formed a real friendship. This is consistent with mentee responses that identified relational outcomes without long lasting consequences apart from the establishment of some valuable friendships.

Surprisingly to the researchers, focus group discussion frequently resulted in the observation by mentors that **the experience had changed their own perception of youth ministry** and built their confidence in interacting with youth. Comments included "*It has led to a shift in my*

ministry focus" and "*I felt a change in my approach to evangelism. I did not need to preach at him, but rather just to create a friendship.*" At least five of the mentors explained that as a consequence of their participation in the mentoring program, their approach to running youth groups and some church activities had changed to become more inclusive and relational. A theology student stated, "*This program changed my view on my future ministry where I will make children my focus*". Some mentors also acknowledged a strong reverse-impact effect as reflected in the comment "*It's like they are mentoring you rather than you're mentoring them...like he mentored me more than I mentored him I'm sure*".

Two mentors struggled with their mentees, expressing concern that **there needs to be flexibility** for reallocation relatively early in the process, especially when a relationship based on common interests fails to develop or if either party feels awkward. In cases where there is "*no connection with the kids*" and therefore limited ability to "*bring out something that was worthwhile*" continuing a match may be counterproductive.

Virtually all of the mentors agreed that it was important to **improve the depth and longevity of their relationships** with mentees. Suggestions included allowing mentors to contact mentees out of school, exchanging phone numbers, and participating in camps or community service activities on a more regular basis. Some mentors expressed frustration that they had established a relationship over one semester, however were not facilitated to continue for a longer period. "*I just found it really difficult trying to stay connected with him now that we don't have a regular time...if it's structured in such a way that the first semester we get to know them and get that level [of friendship] that trust is built up; and [in] the second semester that trust expanded and we could show them a whole new world about what life is all about.*" In feedback sheets 16 mentors asserted that they hoped to continue the mentoring relationship beyond the conclusion date.

A commonly expressed concern was that when the program ceased there was no follow-up opportunity for mentors to contact mentees, and that the matches ended awkwardly at a BBQ. Indeed, a worry expressed was that having gone to lengths to establish a relationship based on mutual trust, the program ended with the end of the mentor's academic semester, reflecting the needs and convenience of the mentors, rather than respect for a relationship. Reflecting on this one mentor said, "*They say build this relationship up and then stop. Kind of doesn't really present a good image to the kids.*" A mentor expressed being "*more intentional with the phasing out*" was desirable, perhaps due to the concern that "*having adults quit on them is their life story*."

All the mentors were enthusiastic about applying practical, youth ministry skills to a mentoring program that facilitated "*meeting real people, meeting some real needs*." In the words of a theology student mentor who was endorsed enthusiastically by four others present in his focus group, "*It was [a] crime to bring us back an hour later. It was like, leave us out there for another two or three hours, please!*"

> ***"It was a crime to bring us back an hour later. It was like, leave us out there for another two or three hours, please!"***

Discussion

It is difficult to estimate the number of SBM programs currently run in Australia that target youth. This is due to their diversity, geographical spread, divergent goals, dissimilar funding bases and differing levels of formality. However, those programs that are registered and tracked do provide useful insights. According to the Australian Youth *Mentoring Matters* report (Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2009, p.1) there were 17,607 young people participating in 106 AYM registered programs for that year. Of 146 programs whose staff completed surveys, 62% indicated that their main priority was to increase the young person's personal growth. Not unexpectedly, most mentees ranged from 12 to 21 years of age. Almost half (48.1%) of the programs identified "at risk school attendees" as their primary target. Other significant groups include Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders (11.3%), unemployed (11.3%), and young people with a disablity (9.4%).

According to the report, the role of mentors in registered programs varies according to the purpose of the program. Mentors in the AYM study do not view their primary role as academic support, sharing this view with mentors in the Big Brothers Big Sisters study (Herrera et al., 2007). When questioned, respondents in the Big Brothers Big Sisters study saw the role of a mentor as follows: provision of general support; providing career advice; improving social skills and providing support for the transition from school to work. Similar perspectives were revealed in this case study. The theology students interviewed saw their primary role as friends and advocates. Some took it upon themselves to help their student meet a goal, for example, to learn to box, to fish or to develop social skills.

The publication of the national Youth Mentoring Benchmarks (AYMN, 2007) represents a welcome addition to resources available to guide development of large, funded mentoring programs and stems from a growing body of literature. The SBM program studied here was not designed with an awareness

of the Benchmarks and is unlikely to comply with many of the guidelines due to its small size and limited resources. For example, it is unlikely that a skilled, paid coordinator will be recruited (one of the benchmarks) and as a consequence many other recommendations are not attainable. Nevertheless, the evaluation of this program and the following discussion does reinforce the importance and credibility of some of the basic guidelines found in the Benchmarks.

The SBM program reported on here has several strengths relating to the mentors. Firstly, a strong partnership exists between the mentoring coordinator and deputy principal of the school, ensuring that the mentors are well oriented and supervised. Secondly, the mentors are idealistic, community oriented theology students with a strong interest in community service and personal development. Thirdly, pre-mentoring training is provided, leaving mentors feeling well prepared for their immediate role and supporting future potential roles. Finally, the matching process is flexible and allows mentees and mentors to self-select their partners. In keeping with a growing body of evidence, the mentors have been trained to be non-judgemental, informal, supportive and flexible. There is little doubt in the minds of the researchers that the program had a significant educational impact on the mentors, as expressed by one mentor who wrote in his MSC statement, "*The first time I spoke to the student who I mentored, was a life changing experience.*"

> ***"The program had a significant educational impact on the mentors, as expressed by one, who wrote, 'The first time I spoke to the student I mentored, was a life changing experience'"***

The long-term impact on mentees is less certain although all mentees did report some evidence for improved social connectedness. One review of empirical studies concludes, "Youth in one-on-one mentoring relationships of shorter duration (3–6 months) experienced no significant improvements in academic, social, and substance use outcomes" (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002, p. 4). In keeping with the Australian National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks (2007), it is recommended that the theology department providing mentors seeks opportunities to extend the length of each match to a minimum of 12 months and re-evaluate the impact on self-esteem or self worth. The Mentoring Matters National Survey Findings (Australian National Youth Mentoring Network, 2009) indicated that only 34% of registered programs report matches of more than 12 months however the common occurrence of short duration mentoring matches can be attributed to convenience and organisational constraints rather than a commitment to maximising efficacy. In the study explored in this paper, increasing the length of match with mentees was desirable for all the mentors interviewed, primarily because they believed it took some months just to establish a relationship and build trust.

In their review of *55* evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs on youth, DuBois, Holloway, Valentine and Cooper (2002, p. 1) found evidence of only a modest or small benefit of program participation for the average youth however noted better outcomes for at-risk youth. They recommended "greater adherence to guidelines for the design and implementation of effective mentoring programs as well as more in-depth assessment of relationship and contextual factors in the evaluation of programs." Unfortunately, small mentoring programs often struggle to provide adequate administrative support. Cost implications are significant. MacCallum and Beltman (1999, p. vi) note that a large school "employing the equivalent of one person to run a program with no other responsibilities in the school may be able to maintain 50 one-to-one mentor relationships." Most small SBM programs are run on goodwill and the enthusiasm of their coordinators. This certainly was the case with the SBM program reported on.

Conclusion

It is desirable, even for the small SBM program evaluated here, to utilise effective program design and planning, including objectives and desired outcomes necessary for the development of an effective monitoring and evaluation system. Development of appropriate policies and procedures, including an information booklet for stakeholders is desirable, as is monitoring and support for the match throughout the mentor-mentee life cycle that enables match improvement and adjustment. Help for mentors and mentees to reach closure or transition is an important need identified in this study and like all the recommendations above, should be achieved, in keeping with the national benchmarks.

Like many small mentoring programs in Australia, the SBM program reported here has relied previously on anecdotal evidence to justify continuation. Credible annual evaluation that reports substantial outcomes for mentees is likely to result in program improvement and may lead to additional program funding and replication. Grossman (2009, p. 20) points out that "not every program should conduct a rigorous impact study: it is a poor use of resources, given the cost of research and the relative skills of staff." However, Grossman does suggest there is merit in tracking three key dimensions: youth and volunteer characteristics, match length, and meeting quality benchmarks. When interviewed, the 2010 director of Seventh-day Adventist schools noted that there is significant

scope for an Australia-wide SBM program or suite of programs, within Adventist schools, utilising better resources, improved coordination and benchmarking for programs that already exist. This observation is likely to resonate with the view of administrators of other education systems in Australia. The researchers of this paper suggest that application of the Australian National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks would improve the learning outcomes for mentors and mentees in the program studied. However, an abbreviated, revised benchmark document and checklist may be desirable for informal, short duration programs. Since further research is required to investigate the true impact of short-term SBM mentoring programs on both mentors and mentees, future support should resource systematic evaluation and reliable investigation of the factors influencing effectiveness. TEACH

References

Australian Youth Mentoring Network. (2007). *National youth mentoring benchmarks 2007*. Retrieved 25 July, 2010, from http://www.youthmentoring.org.au/benchmarks.html

Australian Youth Mentoring Network. (2009). *Mentoring matters: The state of play of AYMN registered mentoring programs national survey findings 2009*. Retrieved Aug 1, 2010, from www.youthmentoring.org.au/assets/Survey%20Report.pdf

Bauldry, S. (undated). *Positive support: Mentoring and depression among high-risk youth*. Retrieved August 1, 2010, from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/202_publication.pdf

Converse, N., & Lignugaris/Kraft, B. (2009). Evaluation of a school-based mentoring program for at-risk middle school youth. *Remedial and Special Education* January/February, *30*, 33–36.

Deutsch, N. L., & Spencer, R. (2009). Capturing the magic: Assessing the quality of youth mentoring relationships. *New Directions for Youth Development, 121*, 47–70.

DuBois, D. L., & Karcher, M. J. (Eds). (2005). *Handbook of youth mentoring*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

DuBois, D. L., Holloway, B. E., Valentine, J.C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30*(2),157–197.

Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) technique: A guide to its use*. Retrieved August 1, 2010, from http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf

French, W., & Unser, J. (2007). *BSomeone2Somebody: Mentoring training series*. NSW: Adventist Development and Relief Agency Australia Ltd.

French, W. (2009). School mentoring program 2009: Exit data collection. (Unpublished)

Governor's Office for Children, Youth and Families. (2005). *Five keys to youth success: Unlocking the door to Arizona's future*. Retrieved July 25, 2010, from http://gocyf.az.gov/CYD/Documents/FiveKeysWebsiteVersionLinks.pdf

Grossman, J. B. (2009). *Evaluating mentoring programs*. Retrieved August 1, 2010, from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/303_publication.pdf

Hawkes, T. (2001). *Boy oh boy: How to raise and educate boys*. Pearson Education Australia: Australia.

Herrera, C., Grossman, J. B., Kauh, T. J., Feldman, A. F., & McMaken, J. (with Jucovy, L. Z.). (2007). *Making a difference in schools: The big brothers big sisters school-based mentoring impact study*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. Retrieved July 12, 2010, from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/220_publication.pdf

Hughes, C., & Dykstra, S. J. (2008). University students' expectations for mentoring high-poverty youth, *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship. 1*(1).

Jekielek, M. S., Moore, K. A., Hair, E.C., & Scarupa, H.J. (2002). *Mentoring: A promising strategy for youth development*. Retrieved 1 August, 2010, from www.childtrends.org/pdf/mentoringbrief2002.pdf.

Jucovy, L. (2000). *The ABCs of school-based mentoring*. Retrieved August 1, 2010, from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/32_publication.pdf

Jucovy, L. (2001). *Building relationships: A guide for new mentors*. Retrieved August 1, 2010, from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/29_publication.pdf

MacCallum, J., & Beltman, S. (1999). *International Year of Older Persons Mentoring Research Project*. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs Report. Available from http://www.detya.gov.au/schools/publications/index.htm

MacCallum, J., Beltman, S., & Palmer, D. (2005). *Mentoring as a context for developing motivation*. Paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Sydney, November 29, 2005. Available from http://www.aare.edu.au/05pap/mac05613.pdf

Randolph, K. A., & Johnson, J. L. (2008). School-based mentoring programs: A review of the research. *Children and Schools, 30*(3), 177.

Reid, E. S. (2008). Mentoring peer mentors: Mentor education and support in the composition program. *Composition Studies. 36*(2), 51–79.

Rhodes, J. E. (2008). Improving youth mentoring interventions through research-based practice. *Community Psychology*, 41:35–42.

Ridley, W. B., & Johnson, C. R. (2008). *The elements of mentoring*. Palgrave Macmillan: USA.

> ***There is significant scope for an Australia-wide program within Adventist schools, utilising better resources, improved coordination and benchmarking for programs that already exist***

TEACH JOURNAL

Call for papers

Readers are encouraged to share their experience and expertise with others. *TEACH* welcomes contributions on a wide range of topics related to education.

Submissions may include:

- research and scholarship
- critical reflections
- innovative practice
- case studies
- educational administration
- reflections, impressions and expriences of teachers

The editor is happy to receive queries or submissions at: TEACH.editor@avondale.edu.au

For guidelines, go to: www.ministryofteaching.edu.au/journal/call_for_papers.html

MinistryOfTeaching