

The Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (SMILE):

A functional approach to predicting mentor satisfaction from mentoring interactions

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Abstract There are many unanswered questions in the field of youth mentoring. Why do so many mentors quit prematurely? What actually happens in mentoring meetings between mentors and youth? Are male and female mentors differentially effective (DuBois et al., 2002)? What does the burgeoning practice of school-based mentoring look like, and might it provide a format that increases mentor follow-through (Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000)? We examined the experiences of mentors in school-based mentoring to see which demographic factors and mentoring activities played a role in their satisfaction with mentoring. We also examined (a) the role of sex and ethnic differences in mentors' initial reasons for mentoring, (b) the relationship between mentoring activities and mentors' outcomes, and (c) how mentor and mentee characteristics contributed to the activities they engaged in during their meetings. We found the type of activities varied mostly as a function of the mentee's age and sex. Consistent with the literature on youth mentoring (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, in press), two types of activities occurred (developmental and instrumental), and both had different relationships with mentor outcomes.

Introduction Given the fact that most program-based youth mentoring matches end within the first six months (Rhodes, 2002)—most commonly from mentor attrition due to dissatisfaction—it is critically important to learn what mentors “get out of mentoring.” Understanding this may help program staff recruit mentors who are more likely to experience their hoped-for benefits through mentoring and thus to persist longer (thereby increasing mentor retention rates). Of course, mentor outcomes (like mentee outcomes) are likely a function of individual (mentor and mentee) characteristics as well as what goes on in the mentoring match (Karcher, 2004).

To understand what happened during matches, we employed the terminology of *instrumental* and *developmental* for characterizing mentoring relationship goals (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1990). In developmental mentoring activities the primary focus is on facilitating the relationship between mentor and mentee as a way of promoting the youth's development. In this form of mentoring, mentors encourage playing games, recreational activities, casual conversations, and discussion of close relationships (activities e, g, h, j, k, and l in Figure 1). In instrumental mentoring activities the primary goal is learning skills (e.g., vocational), achieving specific goals, or thinking critically about issues that may be important to the youth's future (activities a, b, c, d, f, and i in Figure 1). We hypothesized that youth would be more receptive to developmental mentoring and that youths' rejection of instrumental activities might foster frustration among mentors who used that approach.

Mentor’s Record of Mentor-Mentee Interaction © Karcher, 2004

Name: _____ Mentee name: _____ Date: _____ Weeks met: _____

Only if the Discussion or Activity types below do not include all that you did, describe what happened during your meetings in the space to the right in addition to completing the second below

How much of your time did you spend on these discussion topics: none, some, much, or most?

How much of your time did you spend on these activities: none, some, much, or most? (other than time simple spent in discussion of these topics).

| | | none | some | much | most | | | none | some | much | most |
|---|---|------|------|------|------|---|---|------|------|------|------|
| A | Academics (discussion) (Grades, school, testing, etc.) | | | | | I | Tutoring/Homework (Helped with homework, did tutoring, helped with reading, library, computer work, etc.) | | | | |
| B | Behavior (Detention, misbehavior, etc.) | | | | | J | Sports or athletic (Basketball, soccer, catch, volleyball, tennis, etc.) | | | | |
| C | Attendance & stay-in-school (school importance) | | | | | K | Creative activities (Drawing, arts and crafts, reading and writing for fun, photography, etc.) | | | | |
| D | Future (College, career, goals, dreams, etc.) | | | | | L | Indoor games (Board games, playing cards, chess, computer games, puzzle, etc.) | | | | |
| E | Casual conversation (Discussion of sports, weekend activities, holiday plans, Fiesta, etc.) | | | | | Please circle the letter(s)(e.g., D, H, or L) indicating the discussion topics or activities that the student suggested or brought up (rather than those initiated by you, the mentor). | | | | | |
| F | Social issues (Current events/news, poverty, crime, religion, race-related issues, etc.) | | | | | | | | | | |
| G | Relationships (talk about) family _____ teachers _____ friends _____ romantic friend _____ | | | | | | | | | | |
| H | Listening and learning (Mentee’s hobbies & interests, feelings) | | | | | | | | | | |

Please **circle** the letter(s)(e.g., D, H, or L) indicating the discussion topics or activities **that the student suggested or brought up** (rather than those initiated by you, the mentor).

Signature: _____
Mentor

Source: Karcher, M. J. (2004). W. T. Grant funded Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (S.M.I.L.E.): Year I results. Unpublished report, University of Texas at San Antonio.

We applied the functional theory of adult volunteerism, in which Clary et al. (1998) argue that volunteers seek out specific experiences (goals) and that the achievement of their functional goals is likely to increase the volunteer's persistence. Given the variety of activities in which mentors can engage, there may be an interaction between mentors' goals and their actual interpersonal experiences that may explain much of the benefits that they perceive of being a mentor. This may be a particularly salient issue in school-based mentoring where mentors often feel the pressure from teachers to focus on instrumental activities that may conflict with their intended motives.

Method

Sample. Mentors (n = 151) were enrolled in the Communities in Schools (CIS) program as volunteer mentors assigned to one of 16 middle and high schools in San Antonio, Texas. The mentors met individually with a student (92% Latino; between grade 5 and 12) for one hour a week for an average of three to six months. Mentors were recruited by agency staff at military bases, local businesses, colleges and within local organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce). 70% were college students, 13% military personnel, 15% full-time employed adults, and 2% "Other." The mentors included statistically balanced proportions across gender and ethnicity: Latina (n = 54); Latino (n = 18); White female (n = 43); White male (n = 17), though there were more women than men. Each week, after meeting with their students, the mentors completed a log of their activities (see Figure 1 above). Mentors also completed Clary et al.'s (1998) Volunteer Function Inventory (of motivations) before mentoring and the Volunteer Outcomes Inventory (for motivations achieved) afterwards.

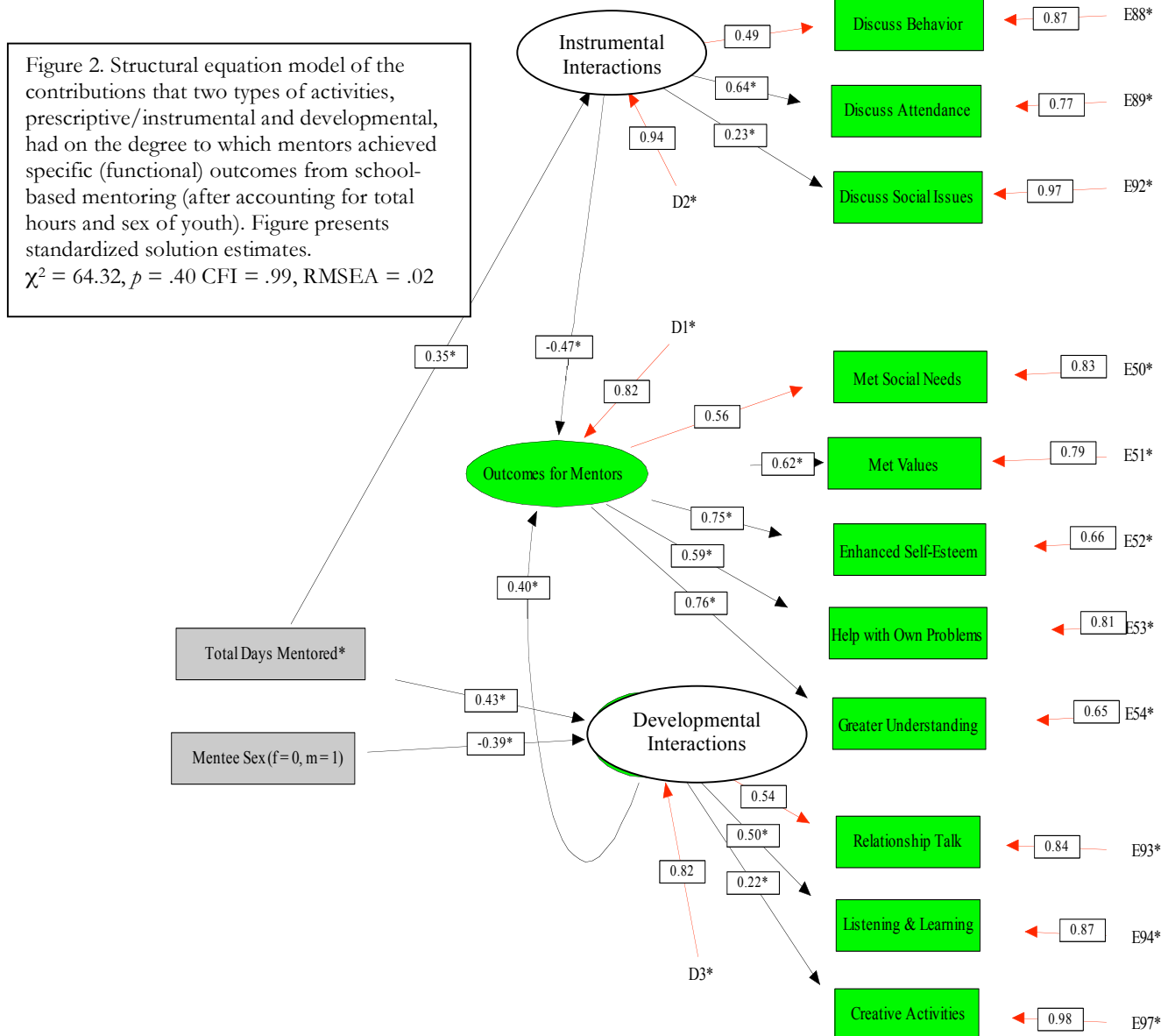
Analyses. Three data analysis steps were taken in this study. First multiple analyses of variance (and covariance) were computed to test for effects of mentor and mentee characteristics on engagement in all 12 activities (detailed info available from first author, mkarcher@utsa.edu). Second, partial correlations were conducted between activities and mentor outcomes, controlling for all significant demographic characteristics. Finally, activities that were significantly correlated with mentor outcomes were included into a structural equations model, in which each activity was loaded on one factor reflecting either instrumental or developmental activities.

Results

Activities. There were no main effects of mentors' ethnicity or sex on activities once variance related to mentees' school level and sex were accounted for because youth characteristics explained most of the variance in the types of activities mentors and mentees engaged in together. High school aged matches were more likely than middle school matches to engage in discussions about academics, the future, personal relationships and social issues, and were less likely to discuss mentees' (negative) behaviors, to play games, or engage in creative activities. Girls were more likely than boys to discuss their future and their school attendance with their mentors. We could not test for a sex by grade level interaction because men never mentored girls, and only men mentored high school boys, so there was a confounding of mentees' sex and age with mentors' sex.

Motivations. There were main effects of mentors’ sex as well as an interaction of mentors’ sex and mentors’ ethnicity on their initial motivations. Women (more than men) reported mentoring as a way to feel better about themselves and to live up to their values by mentoring, while men expected mentoring to be socially satisfying. Anglo males expected the greatest social satisfaction, while Hispanic male mentors expected the least social satisfaction (lower than women). Hispanic men also were least likely to view mentoring as being consistent with their values. Anglo women had the highest and Anglo men the lowest expectation that mentoring would help their careers.

Outcomes. At the end of the year, only 121 of the original 151 mentors completed the outcomes questionnaire. This rendered the MANCOVAs as having insufficient power to detect any gender, ethnicity, or interaction effects. These outcomes, however, were correlated with activity types (controlling for mentee age and sex, and mentor sex). There were multiple significant relationships between activities and outcomes (five outcomes had at least two significant correlations one of the six of the activities, see Figure 2). These were further examined in a structural model.



The structural equations model in Figure 2 reveals that the six activities that correlated with mentor outcomes loaded as anticipated on separate factors deemed instrumental or developmental. The instrumental activities were negatively associated with mentor outcomes (see $-.47$ on path) and developmental activities were positively related to outcomes (see $+.40$ on path). Neither the addition of mentor sex nor mentee age strengthened the model. Because activities occurred before the mentors reflected on their experiences (goals achieved), it seems activities influenced outcomes.

Conclusion The two types of activities most commonly reported in the youth mentoring literature, instrumental and developmental (Karcher et al., in press), made unique contributions to mentor outcomes. Mentors in matches that engaged in more instrumental activities reported the lowest levels of positive outcomes, while mentors in matches enlisting more developmental activities reported the most positive outcomes. Tests of ethnic and gender differences in outcomes achieved, however, were inconclusive, and although mentors' sex and ethnicity played a role in what activities occurred, mentees' age made a much larger contribution to what activities took place. In addition, because mentors' sex and mentees' sex and age were confounded (see above), it would be unwise at this point to provide men and women different training. However, the relationships between these activities and mentors' initial motivations might provide a useful focus for modifications in mentor recruitment and training. Mentors' motivations should be matched with mentees' developmental activity inclinations (e.g., younger mentees play more); but all mentors should be warned of the pitfalls of an overly goal-oriented ("challenging") approach. Finally, further exploration of the meaning of mentors' motivations and how different activities may increase or inhibit the mentors meeting their objectives for mentoring and the mentees' outcomes should be undertaken.

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Food for thought: In that same study, in addition to the increased use of instrumental activities by male mentors (with male mentees) and developmental activities by female mentors (especially, but *not just* with female mentees), a developmental trend also emerged. What are the implications of the trend in Figure 3 for (a) mentor retention/satisfaction; (b) match quality, and (c) match supervision?

