



Youth Mentoring: Do Race and Ethnicity Really Matter?

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Mentors, mentees, race, ethnicity, mentoring programs, mentoring relationships

POPULATION GROUP

Racialized Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Strong Supportive Friends and Families; Education, Training & Apprenticeships;

RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA

SOURCE

Institution

1. What is the research about?

Young people benefit from consistent relationships with caring adults. Studies demonstrate that quality mentoring programs result in positive youth outcomes in areas of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development. While researchers widely agree about the overall benefit of positive and supportive mentoring relationships, less is known about the effects of race, ethnicity, and diversity in youth mentoring relationships. The report notes that the majority of formal mentor-mentee matches in the United States often cross ethnic and cultural communities. Therefore, this study asked the following questions:

- Should mentors and mentees be matched according to race and ethnicity?
- How do same-race matches compare with cross-race matches?
- Does ethnicity and race affect the way mentors and mentees relate to one another?
- How can cultural sensitivity be nurtured in mentoring relationships?

The report examines the challenges and opportunities of mentoring relationships that cross backgrounds and the importance of putting in place structures and training opportunities to support successful outcomes.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research draws on a comprehensive study of formal youth mentoring programs in the US.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about late adolescent or college-aged ethnic minority youth between the ages 18-24.

4. How was the research done?

This research is based on an extensive literature review. Empirical research on issues related to race and ethnicity in formal youth mentorship programs was examined, assessed and analyzed. The report was subjected to a peer-review. The report also includes a case example of a culturally sensitive mentoring program to help frontline youth workers implement recommendations in their own work contexts.

“[M]entors need to be culturally competent in order to develop a successful cross-race pair. Without training in specific competencies, the most well-intentioned mentors may make critical errors that negatively impact these relationships.”

5. What are the key findings?

The key findings can be summarized in the light of four guiding research questions:

Should mentors and mentees be matched on race and ethnicity?

Cultural differences do influence the expectations for and experience of mentoring relationships. When youth had the opportunity to choose their own mentors, they preferred mentors from their own racial or ethnic background.

How do same-race matches compare with cross-race mentor relationships?

Same-race matches were found to be more beneficial with respect to gender. Boys reported increased academic competence and self-esteem; while girls showed increase in school value and self-esteem. However, the research also demonstrates that emotional support and youth satisfaction with mentors is not dependent on race and ethnicity if the mentors and mentees can identify shared interests and experiences in other aspects of their lives.

Does ethnicity and race affect the way mentors and mentees relate to one another?

Mentors must be culturally sensitive in order to establish trust and effective communication channels with mentees.

How can cultural sensitivity be nurtured in mentoring relationships?

Training can help mentors to be responsive to the needs of their mentees. Training should focus on the relational aspects of mentoring such as thoughtfully engaging with the strengths and struggles of mentees, fostering a spirit of authenticity, empowerment and empathy. Youth of colour are challenged by racism and other culture specific struggles. Mentors must be trained to support youth on these issues.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Race and ethnicity play a vital role in the success of mentorship programs. Relationship skills form the foundation of successful mentorship programs. When designing a mentorship program, youth workers must take care to:

- Understand the interests, attitudes and aptitudes of both mentors and mentees.
- Match mentors and mentees based on similarity of race, sex, interests.
- “One-size-fits-all” approaches are not always appropriate or effective. Train mentors to be attentive to the specific cultural experiences and values of their mentees, and work to understand both strengths and struggles in order to responsively and proactively support the mentee.
- Ensure that mentors can make a commitment to mentoring for a minimum of one year.
- Focus on the five aspects of relationship building: authenticity, mutual engagement, empowerment, conflict management and empathy.
- Support the mentor to take a developmental rather than a prescriptive approach. Support exploration, goal setting, and mutual development within mentoring relationship.
- Document the outcomes of a mentorship program you develop. This will help other youth workers and researchers gain further insights into what works best for diverse Mentor-Mentee Relationships among adolescent youth.



Liang, B., & West, J. (2006). Youth mentoring: do race and ethnicity really matter. *Research in Action*, 9, 3-22.

FIND IT ONLINE

http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_390.pdf