

Fostering Self-Regulation Skills in Youth: Effects of a Mentoring Curriculum

KEYWORDS

mentoring; positive youth development; recreation programming; self-regulation

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the effects of a mentoring program on the self-regulation skills of youth participating in a summer recreation program. Self-regulation scores were collected at three intervals from participants in the treatment and control groups. The results demonstrate that the treatment group had a greater increase in self-regulation skills over time.

Self-regulation skills are one of the strongest predictors of whether youth are able to manage difficult life circumstances or not, and youth develop these skills within supportive relationships with adults via modeling. Recreation programs are a context in which adults are already supporting youth, and so they are an ideal setting in which to leverage adult-youth relationships via formal mentoring focused on fostering self-regulation skills, in order to better understand the effects of these supportive adult-youth relationships.

This study defines mentoring with four characteristics: "1) a relationship that extends over time; 2) the mentor has greater knowledge and experience to provide guidance to the mentee; 3) the mentee is able to practice and apply knowledge and skills learned from the mentor; and 4) the relationship is characterized by a lack of "role inequality"" (p. 162). There is substantial evidence in the literature that mentoring supports youth in developing positively, and also that youth develop self-regulation skills as a side-effect of mentoring.

The findings can inform not only researchers, but also the work of recreation and mentoring program directors to better instill self-regulation skills in youth, leading to more positive outcomes in the youth they support.

METHODOLOGY

The recreation program which was selected for this study was chosen based on it meeting criteria regarding emphasizing recreation participation (offering a variety of sports, visual arts activities, etc.) and being a positive youth development setting. The program ran for 8 weeks and had 4 sites, of which the two most similar were selected for the study. A quasi-experimental design was

used; one site received the mentoring intervention while the other served as a comparison group.

There were 35 youth in the treatment group and 29 in the comparison group. Participants were 75% male, 50% Caucasian, between the ages of 9-14 with an average age of 11.3 years old, and 80% qualified for reduced tuition according to their family income.

The mentoring program used in this study was developed by combining two established mentoring/coaching programs. Before the program began, three mentors received a 6-hour training session. Participants met with their mentor for weekly, structured, 15-minute sessions involving discussions regarding the successes and challenges of their week, and setting and achieving goals.

Youths' self-regulation scores were collected from staff at both sites during Weeks 1, 5, and 8. To measure self-regulation, the five subscales (working memory, initiate, planning and organizing, organization of materials, and monitoring) of the Metacognitive Index of the Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Function, Teacher Form (BRIEF-T) were used. The rates of change in scores between sites were analyzed.

Limitations of the study were that there were some cultural differences between the sites and participants, a small sample size, variation in mentors' implementation of scaffolding, and just one measure of self-regulation was used.

KEY FINDINGS

As predicted, results showed that mentored youth increased their self-regulation skills significantly more than youth who only participated in the recreation program without mentoring. Youth at the treatment site had an especially larger increase in planning and organizing behaviours relative to the comparison site. There was a substantially larger change measured in the second half of the program compared to the first half, which might indicate a cumulative treatment effect.

The findings in this study align with existing self-regulation and mentoring research which states that mentoring can increase positive outcomes for youth, and that self-regulation skills can be fostered as a consequence of mentoring.

WHY THIS MATTERS

This study contributes to a better understanding of how adult-youth relationships help to foster self-regulation skills in youth, in the context of

ABOUT THIS SUMMARY

This study modified a summer youth recreation program to include structured mentoring, and demonstrated that this modification significantly increased youth's self-regulation skills.

recreation programs. It shows how it is possible to significantly improve youth outcomes by modifying standard recreation programs. Though it does not directly include practical guidelines, practitioners can benefit from understanding how they developed and structured the mentoring program. Additionally, this study can inform the work of mentoring and recreation program directors.

“...some youth lack adequate access to supportive environments that promote self-regulation, in which case, a recreation program that incorporates a formalized mentoring program may serve as a particularly powerful mechanism for positive development for those youth.” (p. 175)

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