

What would you like to work on today? The impact of one-to-one learning between tutor and tutee

KEYWORDS

tutoring, positive youth development, critical thinking, after-school, community-based, writing

RESEARCH SUMMARY

DESCRIPTION

This summary was provided by Dr. Anne Yendell. Dr. Yendell was a volunteer tutor with Pathways to Education and focused her doctoral thesis on the impacts of one-on-one tutoring on marginalized youth in a community-based after-school setting.

BACKGROUND

Pathways to Education (Pathways) Lawrence Heights was created in the fall of 2007 and, following an extensive community engagement process, began work with local youth entering Grade 9. Since then, Pathways has provided a holistic combination of academic, financial, social, and one-on-one supports to help local youth overcome barriers to high school graduation and promote positive youth development.

During the past seven years, I have had the privilege to tutor students at Pathways Lawrence Heights in writing. Any students requiring writing assistance, whether in the preliminary planning stages of an essay or proofing the final draft of an assignment, are welcome to talk with me about their writing tasks. Over the years, my tutees and I have worked together on written assignments in many subject areas, as well as applications and resumes for universities, colleges, scholarships, and employment opportunities.

Learning how to write is essential for self-expression and remains a principal indicator of future educational and career success and civic participation (National Commission on Writing, 2003; Haynes, 2011; Graham, 2019; Coyle, 2011). However, students who are marginalized, either by income-level or ethnicity, may experience unequal access to meaningful writing instruction in school. This precept is especially important when we consider the potential of alternative learning solutions, such as Pathways' after-school tutoring,

to bridge the educational gap evident in current public education system assessments.

While completing my doctoral studies at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, I discovered that after-school tutoring programmes for high school students had drawn little research attention, and no studies focussed on the efficacy of writing tutoring in this context. Quantitative analyses of tutoring programmes have generally shown positive student outcomes, such as improvements in attendance rates (Afterschool Alliance, 2008; Birmingham & White, 2005; Boston Consulting Group, 2011), grades, performance on standardized tests (Boston Consulting Group, 2011; Hartman, Good & Edmunds, 2011), or reductions in drop-out rates and negative behaviours (Boston Consulting Group, 2011; Grant, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Documenting the impact of tutoring programmes can be challenging, not only because of the programmes' limited capacity and resources, but because the research must also consider the many external forces impacting young people's lives. I determined that a humanistic research approach would provide a deeper understanding of the benefits of one-to-one tutoring at Pathways Lawrence Heights. Although several quantitative studies and reports verify that Pathways generates significant improvements in student outcomes (BCG Assessment of Pathways to Education Executive Summary 2011; Kettle-Verleyen, 2013; Oreopoulos et al., 2017), qualitative data had not been incorporated into their research. Qualitative data, using interviews and ethnographic research, would be useful to establish which aspects of the after-school programme make it effective in drawing student participation, increasing secondary school completion rates, and post-secondary education enrollment, and to more fully understand how the Pathways programme could benefit other socioeconomically challenged communities. In 2019, Unison Health & Community Services consented to my request to conduct my inquiry. The research methods I would use included interviews with Pathways' staff, students, and tutors, journals, and field notes.

ABOUT THIS SUMMARY

In this study, one-on-one learning was found to contribute to more than academic achievement. Findings show that it also supports positive youth development and critical thinking skills.

KEY FINDINGS

At the most basic level, the tutor's role is to provide their student with attentive instruction and constant feedback about their work. My research findings indicate, however, that the benefits of tutoring extend beyond the formal knowledge the tutee receives in two crucial ways.

1. One-to-one learning develops the dispositions and abilities necessary for critical thinking, which is essential for achievement in academic, work, and daily life.
2. When nurtured by their tutors' expectations and trust, tutees gain self-esteem, self-confidence, positive identity, and self-reliance, resulting in better learning and life outcomes.

"I discovered that Pathways' tutors rarely need to motivate their tutees to learn. If I arrive with an open heart, am enthusiastic when communicating my belief in the importance and joy of writing, welcome my tutees as equal partners, and listen and respond to their apprehensions with care and compassion, my tutees usually show up ready to work. Perhaps some people might assume that the tutoring room will be filled with uncooperative and despondent students. Instead, I propose that the many responsibilities and challenges in the youths' daily lives prepare them well for the rigours of writing."

Dr. Yendell, 2022

HOW ONE-ON-ONE LEARNING SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING

Educational researchers agree that writing skills are best learned in meaningful contexts and through meaningful communication. The writing tutor and tutee work collaboratively within the context of the tutee's writing, and the tutor's instruction is continuously tailored to both supplement and "connect the dots" in their tutee's learning. During the sessions, the tutee is shown how to collect, integrate and clarify the information they will use for their school assignment and then, express their deepened understanding in written form. Exercising advanced logic and organizational and reasoning skills, the writing process fosters other cognitive areas, such as problem solving and creativity. Encouraged to experiment with their writing, and provided with the skills to do so, tutees are individually guided through a process of discovering how to learn. Tutees may begin to reflect and respond with their own views, derived from their own value perspectives. In collaborative and mentorial tutoring spaces like Pathways, an unconstrained interchange of ideas supports students in the discovery of a more critical consciousness.

HOW THE BOND BETWEEN TUTOR AND TUTEE PROMOTES POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The collaborative, mentorial, and anchored nature of one-to-one tutoring led to a subsequent, and equally significant, finding: Pathways' students value the informal coaching and mentoring they receive as much as the formal knowledge imparted to them. Support for the student's developmental needs and personal well-being is the most valuable precondition to academic success. The exchanges between a tutor and tutee are especially conducive to responding to the individual needs of youth from contexts of disadvantage because these interactions create a uniquely personal and meaningful bond. When the student brings their homework to the tutoring session, they may be experiencing low self-esteem and frustration that may stem, for example, from a teacher's comments on a previous assignment. The tutor, however, is afforded opportunities to relate to their tutee as a whole person, with a unique learning style, aspirations, and expectations and, in sum,

as much more than their written work. With compassion, concern, personal attention, and continuous feedback, the tutee feels supported in establishing the study habits and self-discipline to form a positive self-image as a learner. An inherent interest in the subject matter taught may lead to increased school engagement, improved academic achievement and the acquisition of such psychological benefits as greater self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-regulation.

CONCLUSION

Tutors have opportunities to build authentic and consistent connections with their students, and these relationships may become truly developmental for young people from contexts of disadvantage. As a support to classroom learning, tutoring programmes can offer youth an alternate learning space that facilitates a reciprocal sharing of understanding and knowledge and where the social and cultural perspectives of the communities they serve are recognized. When the adults in these programmes demonstrate that they stand against social patterns of inequality, they create a supportive network for, and trusting relationships with, their students, resulting in greater likelihood for the fulfilment of their full potential (Glogowski & Rakoff, 2019).

SUGGESTED CITATION

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FULL PAPER

[Click here to read Dr. Yendell's complete thesis.](#)

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