

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

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Abell Salutes: The "Writing to Learn" Program of the Maryland Writing Project

If a student improves his writing, does he as a consequence improve his ability to learn? Does writing well lead to learning well?

"Writing to Learn," a program developed by the Maryland Writing Project, is committed to the idea that it does. Thus, the project undertakes to have students learn better by teaching their teachers to teach them to write better.

Working on a three-year grant from The Abell Foundation, the project trains teachers in the techniques of using writing strategies to help students increase their knowledge of subject matter. To date, 20 Baltimore City Public School teachers have participated in the 1988 "Writing to Learn" summer institute. Before the program concludes, it is expected that 400 teachers from 45 Baltimore City Public Schools will have taken the special training, and will be employing it in their teaching of writing.

After less than a semester, it is too soon to gauge the program's results. But one of the teacher-participants, Beverly Ellinwood, principal of School #228 (John Ruhrah), feels, "One reason it's working well is that it's non-threatening to teachers, they are volunteers. They aren't tested on the training, they have a relaxed attitude about learning it, and so they bring a special enthusiasm to both learning and teaching. Students are the beneficiaries.

"I think because those of us who took the training are now better at teaching our students how to write, our students are writing better, and learning better."

Which, on a considerably broader scale and designed to affect greater numbers of teachers and students, is the goal of the project. It is a goal to which The Abell Foundation is pleased to lend interest and support.

"Mentoring" As A Technique of Enrichment in the Public Schools:

What Is It? What Does It Cost? How Much Risk Is It Taking Out of Our "At-Risk" Students? The History, Reality and Hope.

"Plato's meeting with Socrates had been a turning point in his life."

So notes Will Durant, the eminent historian writing in his "Story of Philosophy" (Simon and Schuster, New York, N.Y., 1926) of the importance in Plato's life of the relationship he had developed with the older Socrates. "Plato's subtle soul had found a new joy in the dialectic games of Socrates; it was a delight for him to behold the master. He became a passionate lover of wisdom and of his teacher." Was the first recorded mentoring relationship Socrates to Plato?

But mentoring goes back even further. (In Homer's *Odyssey*, Athene assumes the shape of Mentor--the trusted friend of Odysseus--and whispers advice to Odysseus's son Telemachus.) It is as old as the notion that the young will want to emulate the old; the ignorant, the wise; the have-nots, the haves. Always, there have been men and women who have had aspirations (these, the mentees) and other men and women (the mentors) willing to help them achieve them.

Mentors and mentees come in all shapes and sizes. They are old and young and rich and poor, white and black and yellow. They come off of the streets, out of the classrooms, out of the boardrooms.

There are differences among them. But what mentees have in common is a belief in the notion that there is a better life out there, and that one way to get it is to learn from someone who has it. Mentors share the notion that because they have made it in the world, they have a commitment to help others make it.

History supports both notions. Counselors and teachers and sociologists, parents and professors and clergymen, observing at every level of society through the years, appear to be unanimous that mentoring works as a positive influence to turn lives around, or in some cases, to save them. Today, in growing numbers, candidates for teenage pregnancy and the school drop-out and drug-addiction population who choose a mentoring relationship seem, evidence suggests, to be choosing a way out--and up.

It is not surprising, then, that community leaders sensitive to the problems of educating "at-risk" students find themselves supporting growing numbers of both new and existing mentoring programs. Given the community's investment in time, money and hope in the institution of mentoring, The Abell Foundation believes it serves the community's best interests to examine mentoring programs as they are currently meeting needs, and to set out a realistic view of how they might serve future needs.

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"Project RAISE" (Raising Ambition Instills Self-Esteem) is a pilot mentoring program designed for the Baltimore City Public Schools "to help students help themselves to a satisfying life of pride and positive contributions"--or, put in simpler language, to help the students stay in school to graduation, and to avoid the problems of teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and anti-social behavior. Although the program calls for a wide variety of group activities to help accomplish its goals, mentoring is at the heart of it.

"That was a carefully thought-out decision," Joyce Brown, the project director, says. "Over the years, people who have watched all the programs designed to help 'at-risk' teenagers seem to agree that of all the techniques being used, mentoring is among the most effective. On a personal note, I can say that I have been in family counseling for almost 20 years, and I know what a positive influence mentoring can be in the lives of these young people."

There are approximately 450 sixth grade students in RAISE, attending seven Baltimore City middle schools. It is one of the program's long-term goals to have each of the students on a one-to-one relationship with his or her own individual mentor: 450 students, 450 mentors. The seven groups of approximately 65 students are made up of the graduating class of seven of the elementary schools with the lowest achieving students. Each of the seven groups has been adopted by an institutional sponsor which supplies mentors from its ranks. Brown says, "Although they have had an orientation course of training, there is no formal, academic discipline on which to become proficient. Our mentors are those men and woman who, first of all, are attracted to the idea of mentoring. They are interested in helping, they care. Secondly, they have been successful in their lives, with careers and families, and they enjoy the respect of peers. These are the men and women students look up to, and emulate."

One of those men is Andrew Goresch, a vice-president at T. Rowe Price, and a mentor working, as it were, in the trenches. He speaks as a graduate of the mentor orientation course developed by RAISE. "Since the primary goal of RAISE is to help our children graduate from high school, the first role of the mentor must be academic support. Whatever other activities we pursue with our proteges, foremost is academic support.

"The mentor's other responsibilities are to build self-esteem, to help raise ambitions, and to convey to the protege a sense of concern--that he is loved by the people of his world. The major concerns

we focus on are sexuality, drug and alcohol abuse, social responsibility and goal-setting."

The seven institutional participants are Equitable Trust, T. Rowe Price, Morgan, Goucher, New Shiloh Baptist Church, Alpha Phi Alpha and the Church of the Redeemer. Foundation support provides a full-time counselor for each of the seven groups. The commitment of the sponsors, counselors and mentors is for seven years. To support their aspirations to have every child in the Baltimore City public schools graduate from high school, the sponsors hope to extend the program to include a large number of Baltimore's "at-risk" students.

The annual cost of the program is \$500 per child, plus the sums spent at the discretion of the institutions and the mentors.

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The mentoring program at Patterson Park High School looks like only a dream that social workers and educators dream. But it is, in fact, the real-life experience of students living in the Canton/Hightstown/Fells Point area who are participants in "Goalkeepers," a mentoring program functioning under the auspices of the Episcopal Social Ministries. For the effectiveness of it, you have the word of Jeanne Owers, director of the program.

"This is a three year pilot program that has been operating on a slightly smaller scale for two years. But if we could project the potential results by studying a control group in the program versus a group not in the mentoring program based on our experience to date, results would look something like this.

"At the beginning of a school year, the students are sexually active with varying degrees of responsibility. Out of 30 girls, five will become pregnant; as many or more of the boys will father children; many of the students are failing in school and live in a situation at home that does violence to their lives both in and out of school; their absentee rate is very high--on the average, each misses about 30 to 40 days out of the school year. Some will drop out. And perhaps worst of all, at the end of the school year many will not be promoted.

"But projecting the experience we've had to date, at the end of the school year those students who participated in the mentoring program will show marked improvement in their life situations. Attendance improves dramatically; the rate of attendance for the mentoring students approaches 95%. None of the girls will be pregnant, none of the boys will be involved in fathering situations. Grades will go up sharply; 90% of the students will pass to the next grade. Despite our high expectations, some students will drop out.

"And what the mentoring students have in common is involvement with our mentoring program. From September to June they meet faithfully with their mentors--they even have bus passes that allow them to get to the meetings."

The program currently attempts to serve about 30 students, attending the 10th through the 12th grades. The students are referred to the program by their parents, counselors, teachers and the Juvenile Services Agency. Participation is voluntary, but students must apply for admission and agree to commit themselves to certain work expectations and behavior standards.

Mentors (which the program calls "advocates") are adults recruited from the community, many through Episcopal Social Ministries. According to Owers, "Our mentors expose the students to cultural activities and career opportunities, and serve as 'listening posts.'"

Goalkeepers provides its students with a variety of summer jobs to choose from, many of which pay well above minimum wage. Some of the students are asked to continue working for their respective employers in these jobs on a part-time basis through the year. Others have agreed to work as volunteer tutors and role models for elementary school students in a neighborhood "Latch Key" program. For this volunteer work they receive 1/2 credit in school.

Owers estimates the cost of the program to be approximately \$1,500 per student.

"Maybe our confidence," Owers says, "can be attributed to the dedication of our mentors and the level of commitment of our students. It's hard to know. I do know that the results of the mentoring approach so far give us cause for optimism."

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"Peer Project" has been organized by the Division of Adolescent Medicine of the University of Maryland to provide 20 mentors for 40 female students in Southwestern High School. The purpose of the program, according to Drs. Susan Panzarine and Elaine Rubenstein, is firstly, to prevent teenage pregnancy and, secondly, to keep the students in school through graduation.

Each of the mentors--female students themselves--is being paid minimum wage for her service, and takes about 12 hours of training in the Division's version of mentoring. That version includes orientation in communication skills, the identifying of emergency situations and referral resources, how best to establish a relationship with their students and how to emphasize the program's goals.

But why mentoring? What is there about the mentoring relationship that works? "Research is scarce," Dr. Rubenstein says, "but it has long been the observation of social workers and educators

"The goal . . . is to have all of the girls graduate without having become pregnant."

that among teenagers in particular peer pressure is a powerful influence. Peer pressure can be an influence for good or bad. What the Peer Project mentoring program seeks to do--as do all mentoring programs, of course--is to harness the power of this phenomenon for the good."

Here is how that power is harnessed--at least in the Division of Adolescent Medicine at the University of Maryland.

A group of female students out of the ninth grade at Southwestern High School is being selected to participate in the Peer Project program; they have either been recommended by a counselor or a teacher, or have asked to be included. A group of students from the 11th grade is being selected to act as their mentors. Each mentor will be assigned two mentees. Mentors are paid \$3.50 an hour--the minimum wage. The program calls for the mentors to meet with the mentees in their (mentees') homes two hours a week during the school year. The goal of the program is to have all of the girls, mentors and mentees, graduate from high school without having become pregnant. The cost of the program is from \$500 to a \$1,000 per person, depending on how many students are finally included in the program.

"Big Brothers and Big Sisters" serves young people and parents throughout the five counties of Central Maryland, and functions somewhat differently from most of the other mentoring programs. Children from eight to thirteen are recommended to the program by their parents; mentors are chosen from volunteers who are attracted to the program through friends or by the program's advertising. According to the program's director, Debra Shelton, "We look for volunteers who are stable, successful in their lives, over 21, and who have lived in the area for at least a year--and, in particular, who show an earnest interest in the project. We give each mentor about three hours of training; our social workers evaluate the mentors and the mentees, and make the match. There is no rule--young to old, or white to white, or black to black--the judgments are subjective."

Where Big Brothers and Big Sisters seems to differ sharply from some of the other similar programs is the way in which it monitors its results. "The 'little brother' or 'little sister' is evaluated by the social worker after a three hour visit to his or her home at the very beginning of the mentoring relationship on a scale of one to five. Every three months the rating is reviewed--and it is raised or lowered.

"And as for progress," Shelton says, "it has to be said that it is usually very slow. It's seldom that we ever upgrade a child with a one to a five, or even a two to a four. Over the course of a year the child may go up or down a point.

"And mentoring is not always effective. There are examples where it doesn't work out, and distinct reasons why.

"Lack of parental support is the most frequently stated one. A second is where there has been a mismatch; no matter how careful in our pre-screening we are, we find--after the fact!--that we have simply put the wrong mentor with the wrong mentee--or vice-versa. Occasionally a child, or a mentor, will move out of town, and that will upset things. There are a few situations where the mentoring relationship was set up originally because the father or mother has left the household, then when that parent comes back the mentor-mentee relationship may be rejected by one of the parties to it.

"But out of every 100 of our cases I would say that maybe five do not work out."

The cost of the program is about \$1,500 per mentee, per year.

"Career Beginnings," a project of the Human Resources Center of the Heller Graduate School of Brandeis University, is the largest and most ambitious mentoring program in the country. Founded in 1986, it has established and oversees mentor programs in 24 widely-scattered colleges. Its mission is "to increase the number of high school students from low income families that complete high school and enter college, technical training or full-time employment."

According to William Bloomfield, program manager, "Students receive a full range of services and counseling at the college, including workshops on career planning, academic skills, college preparation, skills such as money management and decision-making, a good summer job between their junior and senior years, follow-up after high school, and a volunteer adult mentor--carefully selected and trained--from the business or professional community."

"Some 5,000 students and their 5,000 adult mentors have now experienced a one-on-one relationship within the program. The initial results suggest that the program works.

"We see cases where mentoring does not work"

"In the first class of 2,300 students, 1986 through 1987," Bloomfield says, "95% of the students graduated from high school and 61% went to college. Over 90% successfully completed their freshman year and are continuing their education.

"Closer to 70% of the second class of students in the 1987 through 1988 group intend to go to college. Our best estimate, pending further research and evaluation results, is that 30% may have gone to college without Career Beginnings. We're pleased with these net gains."

While Bloomfield sees mentoring work successfully in Career Beginnings ("for about 95 out of every 100") he sees cases where it does not. "About 70% of our match-ups are 80% of what we want. But when the process does fail, it fails for one of three reasons, or a combination of them: the match-up has been a bad one, the training has been insufficient, or insufficiently learned, or parental support has been lacking. Often, a problem common to all of these situations is mentor expectations--sometimes they are just too high. We try to explain to them, 'If the

student could be everything you wanted him to be, he probably would not need a mentor.' "

The cost per year per mentee is approximately \$1,000.

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There are literally dozens of mentoring programs functioning in Baltimore and in Maryland, and surely hundreds throughout the country--all using varying formulas to deal with what each perceives to be its special needs. Some have long histories, some short. Of special interest in the Baltimore area are "Teen Outreach," "Magic Me," "Project Road Map," the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity's program (nameless), "Project Alpha," "Project Choice." If we can project across the country what is happening with mentoring programs in the Baltimore and Maryland region, the movement is mushrooming; clearly, more and more community leaders are looking to mentoring as a technique to help take the risk out of "at-risk" students.

There are as many approaches to establishing workable and effective mentoring relationships as there are variations in the human dynamic. Although all mentoring programs have (by definition) the same overall goal in common, each has a slightly different approach to the problem.

Each program has a slightly different approach to the problem

*Project RAISE selects its mentors from the institutional sponsors of the program. Positive peer pressure is created by grouping the children based on their graduating class from elementary school. Full time staff is provided for each group of children and the commitment is for seven years.

*Goalkeepers draws its mentors from the community; thus, each mentor is probably ten years older than his or her mentee. The program provides the proteges with summer jobs, and keeps an emphasis on exposing mentees to cultural experiences and career opportunities.

*Peer Project seeks to put ninth grade females in a mentoring relationship with slightly older students of similar background--family, income, school--and is structured to serve both mentor and mentee. Its clear priority is the prevention of teenage pregnancy. The mentors are paid minimum wage for their participation.

*Big Brothers and Big Sisters, which is among the older of the area's mentoring programs, appears to be the most structured of them. Its proteges come to the program through the recommendation of parents; it mentors are chosen from volunteers who have been drawn to the program through media promotion. A social worker visits the home of each applicant to the program and makes a judgmental evaluation of the protege's life situation--background, needs, aspirations, special problems. Once a month the same social worker evaluates the protege's progress, or lack of it, and attempts to be responsive.

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Interested citizens understand only too well that the inner cities of America desperately need what is implicit in the mentoring experience--values that the middle class, in fleeing from the cities to the suburbs, has taken with it: an emphasis on education and on a well-ordered, structured family life. Which leaves these same interested citizens with important questions: recognizing the limited sense in which we are assessing mentoring, does it work? What kind of mentoring is most effective? Should we be doing more of it? Where? How? Where will the money come from? If mentoring has such a long and honorable history, why our sudden interest in it now? Programs designed to address the problems of "at-risk" students have come and gone; why mentoring? And in cases where it doesn't work, why doesn't it?

Taxpayers, educators, students, parents, elected officials--all have a right to the questions and answers.

In the broad and complex social order of any given community, there are simply too many variables to answer the questions with irrefutable data.

But experts, who have known the questions for a long time, are now beginning to focus in on the answers.

Dr. William A. Gray is Director of the International Centre for Mentoring in Vancouver, British Columbia, and has spent over a decade planning his own and observing other mentoring programs for business, government and education.

He believes mentoring owes its recent popularity to societal shifts in American life. "Since the 1950s our society has become dramatically more institutionalized, and thus more structured, a phenomenon that brings on the formal at the

expense of the personal--leaving a void. The mentor fills that void.

"Mentoring works when there is the proper match-up, when there is an honest attempt to provide a specific mentor to deal with specific needs. For example, does the mentee need a father figure? Social skills? Academic help? When the mentor is chosen with a specific need in mind, the relationship usually works.

"With society becoming more complex, I see an increasing need for the personal, one-on-one relationship that mentoring provides. We should be doing more of it, and we shall have to look to the government and private philanthropy to help pay for it."

Dr. Jerald L. Willbur, president of HOSTS Corporation, which researches and develops learning systems in use in school systems throughout the country, has done extensive research on mentoring. "Simply put, mentoring works--in my view there is strong data to support its effectiveness. I refer to such works as D. J. Levinson ('The Season's In A Man's Life,' Ballantine Books, New York), Gail Sheehy ('Passages; Predictable Crises in Adult Life,' E. P. Dutton, New York); and to the more scholarly work of Cohen, Kulik and Kulik, much of which appears in the American Educational Research Journal. They and their colleagues share a documented conviction that research supports the popular consensus: students who enjoy the benefits of mentoring turn out to be more achieving, productive adults; those denied it, lead lives that are greatly hampered."

History is the community's mentor . . .

The history of mentoring as an agent for life-enrichment, for taking some of the risk out of "at-risk" students, makes the case for its effectiveness, and argues for its greater use. That same history is perhaps a mandate to community leadership to make mentoring a major aspect of programming aimed at solving the special problems of these same students, monitoring the many approaches being tested, and in the end, committing more of the community's resources to strengthening existing programs and creating new ones.

History, then, is the community's mentor, whispering (Mentor to Telemachus) sound advice.

It is there for the taking.