

THE EFFECTS OF MENTORING
ON SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN
AS PERCEIVED BY THEIR
MENTORS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

By

Craig T. Monson

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
With a Major in

Education

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

Investigation Advisor

The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout

December, 2000

The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, Wisconsin 54751

ABSTRACT

<u>Monson</u>	<u>Craig</u>	<u>T.</u>
(Writer) (Last Name)	(First)	(Initial)

The Effects of Mentoring on School-Aged Children as Perceived by Their Mentors,
(Title)
Teachers, and Parents

<u>Education</u>	<u>Dr. Amy Gillett</u>	<u>December, 2000</u>
(Graduate Major)	(Research Advisor)	(Month/Year) (No. of Pages)

American Psychological Association
(Name of Style Manual Used in this Study)

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the children in grades kindergarten through eighth in the Menomonie, Wisconsin School District, who received mentors through the Positive Alternatives School Mentor Program, had improved school performance in the areas of academic success, attendance, and attitudes toward school as perceived by their teachers, parents, and mentors. Data was collected at the end of the 1999-2000 school year from the teachers, mentors, and parents of the students who obtained mentors throughout the school year.

The Menomonie School Mentor Program is a mentoring program designed to help at risk elementary school students. Adults or mentors are paired with the students and spend an hour each week on school grounds with the students. It is

not an academic based program. Mentors can help the students with homework, but their function is as a mentor not a tutor.

The instrument was designed to measure the nine main objectives in this study. The instrument was a survey given to the teachers, parents, and mentors of the 42 students who participated in the School Mentor Program at Positive Alternatives Inc. near the end of the 1999-2000 school year. Measured was whether or not the teachers, parents, and mentors of the students in the School Mentor Program felt that the students improved, after being paired with the mentor, in the areas of academics, attitudes toward school, and school attendance.

Only five of the teachers returned the survey. All five (100%) felt that the students who participated improved in all three areas: academics, attitude towards school, and attendance. Only four of the parents returned the survey. Again, all of them (100%) agreed that the program benefited their children in the areas of academics, attitude towards school, and attendance. Due to the low return rate, no clear conclusions could be drawn, but there seems to be agreement that mentoring does have some benefit.

Thirteen of the mentors returned the surveys. Eighty-five percent of the mentors felt that the program benefited the students academically. Seventy-eight percent felt that the childrens' attitudes improved after being involved in the program and 62% felt that the children's attendance improved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my parents for all their support and encouragement. I appreciate everything they have done for me and the help they gave me. They were there when I needed support.

Next, I would like to thank the people at Positive Alternatives for allowing me to do the study on their mentoring program. A special thanks goes to Kim Nimsgren, the Executive Director at Positive Alternatives, for her help in getting resources and aided me in this research project.

Thirdly, I need to thank my Program Director, Jill Stanton. All her help in getting me in the right classes, getting the right signatures, and getting all the paperwork in on time is most appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Amy Gillett. She has helped me in so many ways. She has been supportive throughout this entire process. Her knowledge, teaching, and advice have been very helpful. She has made the very difficult seem easy and the unattainable very reachable. Amy has always turned the negatives into positives.

Craig Monson

December, 2000

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The youth of today are growing up in a difficult society. They are facing a number of challenges which will have major effects on them. Vetterkind (1995) listed these challenges as low socioeconomic status, broken homes, lack of educational tradition, low career expectations, low self-image, peer pressures, overcrowded schools, drugs, crime, welfare, racial discrimination, and unemployment. These problems can lead to poor academic achievement or even dropping out of school (Vetterkind, 1995; Peterson, 1997).

It has been suggested that mentoring programs can help alleviate these problems. According to Vetterkind (1995) we need to let these children know that they are valued and important people. They need to feel that adults care about them, understand their feelings, and are ready to help them if they need it; that someone is rooting for them; there are too many who don't. Hon and Shorr (1998) agreed that students need at least one adult who will take the time with them to talk to them about academic issues and personal problems and often the parents don't do this anymore. Hon and Shorr continued in saying that students need to be motivated and challenged in life. Often the parents aren't around to do this so someone else has to. This is where the mentor comes in.

Tims (1997) stated, "School-age youngsters today need additional people in their lives who support and motivate them to identify and achieve goals in life. Many of our students do not have an adult who has the time or can help with the child's schoolwork" (p. 67).

Vetterkind (1995) defined mentoring as a one-to-one relationship between a caring adult and a student who needs support to achieve academic, career, social, or personal goals. The mentor is an effective role model who builds the

student's trust and helps the student with personal development.

There have been many studies done that show mentoring as an aid to people. Mentoring can help learn job skills, raise self-esteem, raise competency levels, reduce truancy, and increase levels of learning. According to Vetterkind, a study done by Tulane University showed significant results in improvement of time-on-task, classroom test scores, and completion of homework assignments. This study also found an improvement in attendance. Davalos and Haensly (1997) found that 24% of the students in their study stated that they felt improvement in their study skills and work ethic after working with a mentor.

Several studies (Donder, 1997; Reglin 1997; Hon and Shorr, 1998) listed improvements in students' self-esteem, performance, and achievement. Knowing these benefits will make it easier for educators and administrators to push and gain public support to implement these programs. They can gain support from the community and the students.

A study done by Rockwell (1997) found no significant improvement in academic achievement or school attendance. She did find evidence of some improvement in these areas, just not overwhelming. The one area she did find significant positive results was in the mentor program that had a reward system for the participating youth. She claimed that if students could see direct results, they would want to participate in these mentoring programs more often and take them more seriously.

According to Hon and Shorr (1998) the mentoring technique is based on the idea that all individuals need three things to succeed. They need a dream, someone who believes in them and can help them, and determination. Mentors are there to assist in this process.

Statement of the Problem

Children who are doing poorly in school need something to help motivate them, to help them want to improve their work. The children need academic success before they start disliking school and studying. The research has shown that mentoring has a positive effect on children. Children who have had a mentor have shown increases in self-esteem, better attitudes toward school, and improvement in academic performance (Roper-Davis, 1999; Rockwell, 1997; Hon & Shorr, 1998). There has also been a study showing that mentoring hasn't been as beneficial as it thought it should have been (Rockwell, 1997).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the children in grades kindergarten through eighth in the Menomonie, Wisconsin School District, who received mentors through the Positive Alternatives School Mentor Program, had improved school performance in the areas of academic success, attendance, and attitudes toward school as perceived by their teachers, parents, and mentors. Data was collected at the end of the 1999-2000 school year from the teachers, mentors, and parents of the students who obtained mentors throughout the school year.

Objectives

There were nine main objectives of this study.

1. To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically.
2. To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically.
3. To determine if the mentors felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically.
4. To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program benefited the

students' attitudes toward school.

5. To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program benefited the students' attitudes' towards school.

6. To determine if the mentors felt the mentoring program benefited the students' attitudes' towards school.

7. To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance.

8. To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance.

9. To determine if the mentors felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance.

Definition of Terms

The definitions of terms are as follows.

Mentor - may mean "teacher, coach, trainer, positive role model, developer of talent, opener of doors, protector, sponsor, and successful leader" (name and year).

Mentoring - a one-to-one relationship between a caring adult and a student who needs support to achieve academic, social, professional, or personal goals.

Positive Alternatives, Inc. – a non-profit agency in the Menomonie area that provides services for youth and their families.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions pertaining to this study.

1. The student and mentor met for one hour a week, every week after being assigned to each other.

2. The mentor cleared the background check and was accepted into the

program as a mentor.

3. The students, parents, mentors, and teachers were honest when filling out the survey at the end of the program.

Limitations

There were some limitations in this study.

1. The student and mentor may not have met on a weekly basis but said they did.

2. The student may have had problems at home that were beyond the capacity of a mentor.

3. The mentor and student may have just been more social in their meetings.

4. The student may have just “matured” throughout the course of the year and the improvements in schoolwork were from that and not the contributions of the mentor.

5. The students, parents, mentors, or teachers may not have filled out the survey at the end of the program honestly. They might have responded the way they thought the question should be answered, rather than what they honestly thought.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter will review literature relevant to mentoring and mentoring programs. The following topics will be discussed in this review. It will discuss the explanations and history of mentoring. Discussed next will be where mentoring is being used. This will be followed by the benefits of mentoring, why it is important, how it is being used, and why it should continued to be used.

History and Explanation of Mentoring

According to Reglin (1997), the first to use the term mentor was the ancient Greek poet Homer in his poem the Odyssey. Odysseus, before he left for the Trojan War, chose a man named Mentor to be the guardian and tutor of his son. Mentor came to mean any trusted counselor or guide. The word came to mean a loyal, wise, and trusted teacher and friend. The term has evolved into meaning many other roles such as advocate, buddy, and friend. Donder (1997) stated that a mentor is any caring, mature person who forms a one-to-one relationship with someone in need. A mentor is someone who listens, cares, gives advice, and shares information about life experiences with a young person. Donder continued by saying a mentor serves as a role model, offering friendship, support and guidance, and assist in making intelligent choices.

Vetterkind (1995) defined mentoring as

a one-to-one relationship between a caring adult and a student who needs support to achieve academic, career, social, or personal goals.

However... the goal is not the same as that of a tutor, professional counselor, or social worker. It is to achieve strong supportive mentoring relationships that builds students' trust and provides effective role-models

for positive personal development by the students.(p. 3)

Davalos and Haensly (1997) stated, “One university mentor described his ultimate function in that role as being a psychic midwife for the bringing forth of a creative being” (p. 204). They continued by saying that “mentoring is critical and complementary not only to career development, but also to making the entire school experience personally meaningful to youth” (p. 204).

Mentoring can then be described as any positive influence by an older or more experienced person onto a younger or less experienced individual. It can be any kind of ongoing support, help, or advice administered by one individual to another.

Where Mentoring is Used

Numerous successful people have had mentors in their lives. These people have said that their mentors inspired and encouraged them. Muhammad Ali credits his manager, Herbert Muhammad, with being a major reason for his success. Rev. Jesse Jackson has said the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was his mentor (Reglin, 1997). Many other famous people have talked about someone else they admired or looked up to for inspiration.

Mentoring is done in many places and aspects of life. It is used in the workplace, community, and school settings. Donder (1997) discussed how mentoring has long been considered an important role of senior members of many professions. Doctors, lawyers, and teachers look to experienced professionals for help. A recent survey of some 400 professional women from business, law, education health, and government showed that three-fourths of these women said that their mentors were important to their growth and development (Donder, 1997). Mentors can be used to help new employees get the feel for the job or help fellow employees with new programs that may be

implemented.

Mentoring is often used for teachers. "Recently in California public school system, teachers chosen by their teachers have been acting as mentors for beginning instructors, and now women are consciously reaching out to have the mentor relationship specially designed for them" (Donder, 1997, p.884). Wood and Killian (1998) reported that mentoring is frequently used and is highly valued. Both the principals and the new teachers said it was essential for first-year teachers to learn what it takes to function effectively as a "teacher in the school." The same report also stated that experienced teachers also used mentoring. One principal spoke about moving one teacher's classroom so it could be next to another teacher who had instructional strengths in an area where the first teacher had weaknesses. The teacher with weaknesses could observe and discuss teaching with a strong teacher and improve instruction.

Montgomery-Halford (1998) found that in a California study, the most effective approach to aid new teachers was the relationship between the new teacher and a support provider. "Simply put, new teachers need someone to talk to" (p. 35).

Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring may not have an immediate effect on the child; it is more of a long-term process. According to Hon and Shorr (1998), the program coordinator of their study cautioned mentors about expecting to see drastic changes in their mentees over a short period of time. The mentors may not see progress, but the relationships are most likely having impacts on the students, it just takes time to show the effects.

There are many benefits to mentoring of children in schools. Roper-Davis (1999) listed some of the benefits she found in her studies. She reported that

73% of mentored children showed higher goals and expectations and 59 % showed grade improvements. Also stated was that students involved in a mentoring program had less negative classroom behaviors, attended school more regularly, improved relationships, and had positive changes in knowledge and attitudes. She also reported on a Proctor and Gamble study done in 1988 which stated mentored young people stayed in school and achieved better grades.

Results in a study done by Hodge (1997) found that 47.4% of the respondents believed that the mentoring structure within their program contributed significantly to their success. Thirty-six percent of the respondents thought that the mentoring structure within their program area was excellent and 73.7% of the respondents sought a mentor in their program area.

The study done by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America(1999), the largest mentoring program in the United States, found some very interesting results in their national study of their school based mentoring program during the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 school years. They found that Big Brothers Big Sisters school mentors had a positive, measurable effect on children. The following results were according to the children's teachers. Sixty-four percent of students developed more positive attitudes toward school. Fifty-eight percent achieved higher grades in social studies, languages, and math. Sixty percent improved relationships with adults, and 56% improved relationships with peers. Fifty-five percent were better able to express their feelings. Sixty-four percent developed higher levels of self-confidence. Sixty-two percent were more likely to trust their teachers. The study also found that 77% were less likely to repeat a grade. The students in the program also had a reduced number of unexcused absences.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Chippewa Valley, based in Eau Claire,

Wisconsin, did a similar study during the 1999-2000 school year. The results in this study showed a very positive effect of mentoring on students involved in the school-based program. The changes in youth as perceived by mentors, parents, and teachers are as follows: over 60% of youth showed improvement in their school performance; fifty-nine percent showed improvement in their attitude towards school; sixty-three percent were able to avoid delinquency; and eighty – eight percent demonstrated improvement in self-confidence according to their mentors, teachers, and parents. This study showed definite improvement in the students who received mentors.

It has been documented that children who receive mentors do better in all aspects of life including school. The research has supported this idea that children who do have positive adult support will improve in school performance. It is the purpose of this study to examine the benefits that school-aged children will receive in the school-based mentoring program at Positive Alternatives as perceived by the childrens' teachers, parents, and mentors.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will include a description of the sample selection, instrumentation, research procedures, data analysis, and limitations of this study.

Objectives

There are nine main objectives of this study.

1. To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically.
2. To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically.
3. To determine if the mentors felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically.
4. To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program benefited the students' attitudes toward school.
5. To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program benefited the students' attitudes' towards school.
6. To determine if the mentors felt the mentoring program benefited the students' attitudes' towards school.
7. To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance.
8. To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance.
9. To determine if the mentors felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance.

Subjects

The subjects in this study were the teachers, parents, and mentors of the kindergarten through eighth grade students in Menomonie, WI. who participated in the Positive Alternatives School Mentor Program. The School Mentor Program is a mentoring program designed to help at risk elementary school students. Each student was paired with a mentor sometime during the school year. Adults or mentors are paired with the students and spend an hour each week on school grounds with the students. It is not an academic based program. Mentors can help the students with homework, but their function is as a mentor not a tutor.

Instrumentation

Surveys were used for the objectives. The teachers, mentors, and parents of the students in the mentoring program were all given surveys. They were filled out on a voluntary basis and were confidential.

The surveys were developed by the researcher. They were designed to evaluate what the teachers, mentors, and parents of the students thought of the mentoring program. The survey questions were simple yes/no questions in the areas of the objectives of the study. There was a place for additional comments at the end of each survey. A separate survey was given to the teachers, mentors, and parents of the subjects evaluating if and how they thought the mentoring program benefited the subjects.

The researcher was confident that the instrument had content validity in that it measured the information it was intended to measure.

Data Collection and Procedures

The data for the study was were collected in cooperation with the teachers, mentors, parents of the subjects, and Positive Alternatives.

The surveys were mailed to the primary teacher, mentors, and the parents

of the students involved in the mentoring program. They mailed them back to Positive Alternatives in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelopes. The teachers' surveys had the names of the students on them so they would know which specific student was being addressed. The names were put on the surveys by the School Mentoring Coordinator at Positive Alternatives. The teachers, parents, and mentors were reminded that their participation in the study was voluntary. They could take as much time as needed. They then mailed them to the researcher via Positive Alternatives when they were finished. When the surveys were returned, the coordinator then removed the names to protect the students' anonymity from the researcher.

Data Analysis

For the surveys filled out by the mentors, parents, and the teachers, frequencies and percentages were computed to analyze the information.

Limitations

There were some limitations with the methodology of this study.

1. The teachers may not have been honest when filling out the survey.
2. The parents may not have been honest when filling out the survey.
3. The mentors may not have been honest when filling out the survey.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Introduction

This chapter will include the results of the study to determine whether mentoring had positive effects on the academic performance of school-aged children. Demographic data was collected for use by Positive Alternatives, however, that data was not released to the researcher due to the confidentiality of the information and the researcher's request for anonymity of the respondents. Data will be reported on each of the research objectives through frequencies and percentages.

Research Objective Number 1

To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically. Of the 42 teachers who were sent the survey, 5 were returned. The results indicated that unanimously (100%) that the responding teachers thought mentoring benefited the students academically. Due to the low response rate, no clear conclusions could be drawn.

Research Objective Number 2

To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically. Of the 42 parents who were sent the survey, 4 parents responded. The results indicated that unanimously (100%) the responding parents felt that the mentoring programs benefited their child. Due to the low response rate, no clear conclusions could be drawn.

Research Objective Number 3

To determine if the mentor felt the mentoring program benefited the students academically. Of the 40 mentors who were sent the survey, 13 responded. The results indicated that 85% felt the program was beneficial to the

students, while 15% indicated that it was not beneficial.

Research Objective Number 4

To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program benefited the students' attitudes towards school. Again, of the 42 teachers who were sent the survey, 5 responded. The results indicated that all (100%) felt the students' attitudes toward school were better. Due to the low response rate, no clear conclusions could be drawn.

Research Objective Number 5

To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program benefited the students' attitudes towards school. The results indicated that 100% of the parents who responded felt that their child had a better attitude towards school. Due to the low response rate, no clear conclusions could be drawn.

Research Objective Number 6

To determine if the mentors felt the mentoring program benefited the students' attitudes towards school. The results indicate that 78% of the mentors who responded felt that the child had a better attitude towards school, while 22% felt there was no change in the child's attitude towards school.

Research Objective Number 7

To determine if the teachers felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance. The results indicated that all the teachers who responded felt the student's attendance improved. Due to the low response rate, no clear conclusions could be drawn.

Research Objective Number 8

To determine if the parents felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance. The results indicated that 100% of the parents who responded felt their child's attendance improved after having a mentor. Again,

due to the low response rate, no clear conclusions could be drawn.

Research Objective Number 9

To determine if the mentors felt the mentoring program improved the students' attendance. The results indicated that 62% of the mentors who responded, felt the child's school attendance improved, while the other 38% of the responders felt there was no improvement in the child's school attendance.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Summary

This chapter will discuss and summarize the results of this study. It will also compare them to other studies that have been done.

Many agree that there is a benefit to children who have positive adult figures in their lives. The larger question is the extent to which the benefit of mentoring is and how sustaining it is. Does having a mentor mean automatic success or improvement to the life of the child? Will the child automatically become more successful in school? The obvious answer to these questions is no, but there is evidence that over time, things do improve.

History shows that many successful people had mentors. Great athletes point to coaches who encouraged them. Political leaders had mentors too. The Reverend Jesse Jackson is one of many who were mentored by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who helped lead him to a famous civil rights career. Even the television show Seinfeld did an episode on the mentor-mentee relationship.

The importance of a mentor for bonding with a child and that child's ability to bond with the school and community is unrefuted. Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers agree that youth need positive, consistent relationships with adults to support their development. In a study done on Big Brothers Big sisters of America (BBBSA), the oldest and best-known mentoring program in the United States, Tierney and Grossman (1996) found that participants in the BBBS were less likely to start using drugs and alcohol; were less likely to hit someone; improved school attendance and performance and attitudes toward completing

school work; and improved peer and family relations. Those in the program who had mentors skipped half as many days when compared to those who were on waiting lists. Those students with mentors also felt more competent about doing schoolwork, skipped fewer classes and showed modest gains in their grade point averages.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether during the 1999-2000 school year, the children in grades kindergarten through eight in the Menomonie School District, who participated in the Positive Alternatives Mentoring Program, school performance improved in the areas of academic success, attendance, and attitudes toward school as perceived by their teachers, mentors, and parents. The first objective showed that the teachers, parents, and mentors felt the students improved academically after receiving a mentor. All five of the teachers responding agreed that they thought the students improved academically. The same result was documented with the four parents who responded. Thirteen mentors responded and 85% of them felt the students improved academically after being in the program.

The teachers, parents, and mentors of the students also felt the program benefited the attitudes of the students toward school. Again, all five teachers felt the attitudes of the students improved after being paired with a mentor. The same result was documented by the parents, 100% of them felt the student's attitudes improved. Seventy-eight percent of the mentors felt that the attitudes of the students improved.

Teachers, parents, and mentors also felt the student's attendance improved after being involved in the program. The results showed that all five of the teachers felt the student's attendance improved after being in the mentoring program. All the parents who responded felt the students' attendance improved. Sixty-two percent of the mentors felt this way.

Since there was such a low return rate, no clear conclusions can be drawn, but there was a definite tendency towards positive outcomes of the research objectives. The study done by Hon and Shorr (1998) showed similar results. Of the 19 students who were assigned mentors in their study, 79% demonstrated improvement in their work habits and grades. Their study also showed 89% of the participating students showed improvement in their attendance.

Mentoring programs can have far-reaching benefits to both the child and the community. Studies have shown positive effects on the children who participate in these programs as mentors.

A study done by Moore (1999) of the same program a year earlier showed that all 15 of the teachers that responded in her study answered yes to the question of "Do you believe that the students' involvement in the mentoring program had been beneficial for that student.

Post's (1998) study demonstrated similar results about mentoring. She did a study of the Chippewa Valley Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring program. She compared children matched to mentor, the big brother or sister, to those children who were not matched. The matched group had higher scores in self-

confidence, school performance, attitudes toward school, and trust issues. Post surveyed the mentors, parents, and teachers of the children in the program. A five-point scale was used in the surveys where five was the highest rating. The mean score in self-confidence for the matched group was 3.55 compared to 2.52 for the unmatched group. The mean score in school performance was 2.93 for the matched group compared to 2.30 for the unmatched students. The attitudes toward school survey question resulted in a 3.64 mean score for the matched students compared to 2.77 for the unmatched students. The overall trust of others survey question resulted in a mean score of 4.11 compared to a 3.60 for the unmatched group. The results in Post's study show a definite benefit in mentoring.

The research in this study presents encouraging evidence that caring, thoughtful relationships between adults and youth can be beneficial to the children involved. Although the results may not have been conclusive due to the low return; they did show a positive effect and a resoundingly positive response by the teachers, parents, and mentors who did respond.

Recommendations for Further Research

First, in the opinion of this researcher, make the completion of the surveys to the parents, mentors, and teachers mandatory as part of the program. This will help the return rate and more conclusive data can be obtained. Second, the views of the children involved should also be conducted. This might demonstrate the greatest research of mentoring programs. The opinions of the students can be compared and contrasted to that of their mentors and parents.

Thirdly, a longer drawn-out study could be done to see long-term effects. Track the results of their academic performance and attendance through middle school and high school. This could help document the long-term effects of mentoring.

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