Personal Statement

Mentoring Philosophy and Importance of Mentoring

Historically parents have been the primary figures responsible for socializing and rearing children to be contributing and positive members of society. As social learning theory posits, children learn behaviors primarily by observing them and imitating the behaviors of others. The more a child is exposed to certain traits, behaviors and mentalities the more likely that child will learn and perpetuate those traits, behaviors and mentalities.

As society has shifted in numerous dimensions, this role of socialization has moved from primarily a parent’s duty to a shared role with day-care workers, teachers and other community members. As this responsibility of socialization has been increasingly shared, youth are seemingly less exposed to one-on-one adult interaction and instead placed in “herding” environments or in environments composed predominately of peer-to-peer interactions. An element of this was reflected in Former U.S. Commissioner of Education Harold Howe II’s (1989) statement that schools have become “impersonal teaching factories.” The personal intimacy of the parent-child bond is not emulated in these environments. Therefore, the natural effects of positive maturation that accompany a strong and secure adult attachment are lacking for many of today’s youth. The settings in which children are expected to develop, mature, learn and achieve academically are not conducive to the mechanisms in which learning takes place: relationship-based modeling.

Furthermore, there are numerous studies providing empirical support that youth delinquency, low academic achievement and high-school drop-out rates are strongly associated with youth being exposed to negative behaviors, of which they imitate. In disadvantaged communities, the occurrence of violence, antisocial, and destructive behaviors, low academic achievement and high-school drop-out rates have been far more prevalent, which has resulted in exposed youth learning and acclimating such values, behaviors and norms. Negative behaviors demonstrated by adults or peers have fostered youth to engage in the same behaviors, and when youth then grow into adults, they perpetuate the same behaviors to the next generation. Research has continued to demonstrate a decrease in the availability and exposure of positive adult role models and support in the lives of youth. If natural positive role models do not exist in the community, then mentors can provide positive adult relationships to guide youth’s maturation, foster academic achievement and provide constructive role-modeling.

The goal of mentoring is to either compensate for a lack of positive adult role-models or compliment current positive adult role models so that youth can develop into contributing and positive members of society. This includes education and academic achievement, as education is access to information and information is power: power to change yourself, power to change your community, and power to change the world. Education is the foundation and launching pad by which individuals can positively contribute to society. Thus a key element of mentoring is nurturing academic values, achievement and opportunities.

Personal Mentoring Efforts

My history mentoring low-income underprivileged youth extends for many years and in many locations. I could write pages about all those experiences, however, I will only expand briefly on my
experiences with the youth in Gainesville, FL. Since August 2011 I have been involved in Alachua County Boys and Girls Club. As a volunteer intern I designed and carried out an art program for girls focusing on individual, family and community development, I spent two hours weekly with this small group of girls mentoring them and teaching them. This program won the HONOR national award in 2012. I worked with Boys and Girls Club, as well as the Gainesville Police Department, The Mentoring Center, and Big Brothers Big Sisters to assemble a partnership towards improved mentoring programs in the community. I proceeded to write a million-dollar Office of Juvenile Justice Department grant focused on mentoring in partnership with these community organizations.

However, my most involved mentoring takes place in Carver Gardens Low-income housing complex. I holistically touch every area of the youth’s lives in efforts to provide a supportive, intensive, consistent and positive role-model relationships with these children, whom I have come love. I eat dinner with their families, develop relationships with their parents, eat lunch with them at school, visit their classrooms and assist their teachers, help them with their homework, provide for them opportunities (especially academic!) outside their immediate surroundings, take them to church, and simply hang out with them. From this involvement I saw a need for the youth to have positive activities during out-of-school hours and more relational interactions with positive adult role models, particularly males. So I started a youth boxing program. The students involved in the program are required to sign a contract that holds their behavior and academics to high standards. In order to assess that these standards are being met I visit their classrooms and talk weekly with their teachers and parents.

One particular boy, Z, moved to Carver Gardens to live with his grandma from New York after his mother revoked her parental rights. One week after being in Carver Gardens, Z’s dad also up and left, later found in another state. Z was filled with deep seeded feelings of rejection and abandonment; he easily became emotional at school and would react in fighting when other kids jeered at him. I started mentoring Z, spending time with him and his grandma, taking him to boxing, eating lunch with him, and then visiting his class and helping him with homework. Although he is extremely intelligent, his emotions and social interactions often hindered his academic achievement and potential. Through rocky times, rough words, disrespect and threatened suicide, I, along with others, persistently loved Z and supported him, encouraged him, and motivated him. One day I walked into Z classroom to find Z in the corner crying with balled up fists. The other boys had been throwing things at him and mocking him. But Z didn’t fight! Z eventually calmed down, talked it out and then focused on his school work. That was a minor victory among many! Z successfully graduated elementary school and is now battling the struggles of middle-school. His self-esteem, countenance, demeanor, and academic achievements have greatly improved from when I first met Z, and we continue to work towards even more improvement!

I could effortlessly write a myriad of stories about my experiences mentoring other children in Carver Gardens and at Williams Elementary, which would demonstrate the success mentoring can have in transforming the trajectory of a child’s life. I have seen firsthand how a good positive mentor can (through support, modeling and love) buffer the effects of negative influences and risk factors children are frequently exposed to. Furthermore, faithful and intentional mentors can help repair intergenerational dearth regarding values, behaviors and education. My overall goal as a mentor overlaps with my philosophy described above. I desire to teach and demonstrate to mentees how to think critically, acquire knowledge and understanding, behave morally and ethically and live positive contributing lives. In first-hand observing the cycle of negative behaviors and mentalities that are predominant in Carver Gardens, among every generation, mentoring the youth has been an avenue to stifle the entire cycle and promote growth and change for every generation.
(Larson & Richards, 1994; Masten, 1994; Scales & Gibbons, 1996; Parke & Buriel, 1998).

(Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2011)

(Snyder et al, 2003).

(Miller and Donald, 1941; Rivara, Sweeney, and Henderson, 1987; Bandura, 1986; Huesmann, 1988; Anderson, 1990; Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998; Zimmerman, Steinman, & Rowe, 1998; Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003; Synder et al., 2003; Hurd et al., 2011)

(Bell & Jenkins, 1993)


(Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Rhodes, 2002)