

# Building Youth Literacy In Mentoring Programs



Collected Training Supplements  
and Materials from the MRC

Web Seminar on Literacy and Mentoring

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Web Seminar on Mentoring and Literacy

Presented August 29, 2007

By

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Supplemental materials by Patti MacRae and Michael Garringer

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**\*An mp3 audio recording of the presentation can be downloaded from the MRC Web site at <http://www.edmentoring.org/seminar4.html>**

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# Introduction

**M**entors are not tutors, yet they are often asked to help their mentees do better in school. Because the overall goal of the US Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-free Schools mentoring initiative is to improve the academic performance of children being served, school-based mentoring programs are particularly interested in finding effective ways to achieve academic success. At the same time, mentoring professionals know that mentoring is first and foremost about building a positive relationship with a young person. As emerging research on school-based mentoring suggests, mentoring relationships last longer and are more successful when more time is spent on developmental activities rather than prescriptive ones, such as homework help. Balancing the need to nurture these strong, positive relationships that focus on fun and personal growth with the need to ensure that academic skills improve can be a programmatic challenge for OSDFS mentoring programs and the mentors that volunteer with them.

Mentors can meet this challenge by engaging in activities that build the literacy skills of their mentees. Adolescent literacy development is a critical step in improving overall academic outcomes for students as they transition from elementary to middle to high school. Students who are skilled in reading, writing, and comprehending complex information are more likely to be successful in school. These skills can be learned in many ways, both in the classroom and beyond. The mentoring relationship offers many opportunities to help students understand how reading and other literacy skills are relevant to their lives and their futures and to help them develop a love of reading and learning that can last a lifetime.

This Web seminar provided participants with an overview of literacy issues in the United States today and described specific activities, tools, and approaches that mentors and program staff can use to boost mentees' literacy skills. The presenter, Rändi Douglas, Program Advisor with LEARNS, a program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, has extensive experience in providing support for literacy learning in school and after school programs. Her presentation, power point slides, and supplementary materials provide a useful guide for helping program staff integrate literacy development into their programs and are also easily adaptable for mentor training sessions on the topic.

This document collects the transcript, handouts, and slides from the presentation with the supplemental reading material provided to participants. The audio from the presentation can be downloaded in mp3 format on the Mentoring Resource Center Web site at: <http://www.edmentoring.org/seminar4.html>. Program staff wishing to use the power point slides as part of their mentor training may also access them from the web link.

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# Presentation Transcript: Building Youth Literacy in Mentoring Programs

*Moderators:* Micahel Garringer & Patti MacRae, Mentoring Resource Center

*Presenter:* Rändi Douglas, LEARNS Project, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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**GARRINGER:** Welcome to the web seminar on building youth literacy in mentoring programs. We're very excited to provide this learning opportunity today and we hope that this and the other webinars we've done are valuable supplements to the in person training and other technical assistance that we provide.

My name is Mike Garringer and I am a resource advisor here at MRC, and today I'll be serving as the facilitator on the call. Joining me here in Portland is Patti MacRae who is another advisor with the MRC. She will be facilitating the question and answer portion at the end of the call. Also joining us today is our presenter, Rändi Douglas of the LEARNS Project who I will tell you a little bit more about in just a minute. We're also joined on the call by over 30 Department of Ed mentoring programs around the country with probably about a total of 50 staff participating at the sites.

We're really excited about the topic that we have on tap for today. Obviously we know that improving academic performance and increasing school connectedness are goals that are really shared by every program on this call today. And those are things that are in addition to the wonderful personal and emotional development components that come out of the work your mentors do. But, as Department of ED grantees, you know academic achievement is a high priority and literacy is often the key to achieving a lot of those educational outcomes.

So, although everyone's programs are primarily building these good, solid friendship based mentoring relationships, we think that providing opportunities for your matches to work on literacy issues is a really excellent way of getting to many of the academic goals that your programs and the individual matches might have. To that end, we're going to do things a bit differently with today's web seminar. Rändi's presentation is geared primarily to teach all of you about literacy issues and how you might weave them into the academic activities that your program is providing. But the slides today—the presentation today—is also designed in such a way that you can in turn use it yourself to train mentors around literacy topics.

And so, as we go through the slides today, most of them will be for you, but there are also slides that you can in turn adapt, and there's a couple of key activities that you can do with your mentors and also just questions for your consideration that Rändi will be pointing out, so keep that dual purpose of these slides in mind as we move through them.

So without further ado, let's go ahead and get started.

I'd like to introduce Rändi Douglas of the LEARNS Project which is housed here at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, and she'll talk a little bit more about that. Rändi joined NWREL in 1999, and she develops products and delivers adult training across the nation in child and adolescent literacy, academic enrichment, and the development and management of educational programs for both the National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Her primary professional goal is to improve youth literacy

## Welcome to... Building Youth Literacy in Mentoring Programs

### Please think about:

- 1) What are your memories of being enthusiastic about reading or writing as a teen?
- 2) When has a specific literacy skill been very important in your life?

**Presenter: Rändi Douglas**  
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory  
douglasr@nwrel.org

**Purpose:** To suggest ways, through planning, strategic intervention, and coaching, that lay persons (mentors and youth volunteers) can boost literacy skills in youth

**Audience:** Program directors, site coordinators, and volunteers in mentoring, homework help, afterschool, and other activity programs for youth, grades 5-12

## What is LEARNS?

Training and technical assistance provider for education-focused projects of the Corporation for National and Community Service

A partnership between Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland OR and Banks Street College of Education in NYC

For additional tools, training, and information visit The Resource Center at: [www.nationalservice.gov/resources](http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources)

## Session Goals

The plan is that participants will:

- Learn about statistics creating national concern about youth literacy
- Encounter a planning model for literacy needs of individual youth
- Share ideas about literacy-rich activities for mentor and youth programs
- Consider ways to provide academic coaching
- Receive resources for further learning

working through youth and volunteer programs that interact with children outside of the regular school day. We're delighted that she could take some time away from her busy training schedule to join us here today and talk about how Department of Education mentoring programs can address literacy issues within the context of those healthy and satisfying mentoring relationships. So welcome Rändi and take it away.

**DOUGLAS:** Thanks so much Michael. I'm very happy to be here and thank you to the people who are joining me on my deeply held issue of youth literacy. I grew up in a family where my dad was an English professor and my mom was a reading specialist. Our table talk had a lot to do with the literacy of youth and I grew up thinking about it, it's a very deeply held value.

This PowerPoint is designed for you to use in training mentors and the handouts are to use in the training as well. I'll just start off by explaining that there's some interactive elements that we aren't going to be able to do because of the time limitations and this call format. It's not actually my style to deliver a lecture uninterrupted for as long as this is going to be, so I'm going to really try to move through it rapidly. Two questions before you are just questions about adolescent memories of being enthusiastic about literacy or remembering when its been important in your life. These are seed questions for an icebreaker you can use. Make a note of your own thoughts here, and more on this when the actual activity comes up.

On the next slide, you see my contact information. So if you have any questions about this content you can get in touch with me later. There's also a restatement of our purpose, Michael has addressed this already, so we'll just kind of move on. On slide three you see information about LEARNS—that's the project that's funded this work—LEARNS is a bi-coastal partnership between Bank Street College of Education in New York City and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. We ask if you reuse these materials to retain this slide and if you want to be nice too you could add that I'm the author of these materials—I would appreciate it!

Now, next are goals to think about if you conduct this session. We hope you would aim to provide some statistics about youth and literacy, and then to acquaint the mentors with a planning model for supporting literacy growth. And the planning model helps you to explore pathways for literacy support through common mentoring activities, academic coaching, and connecting to community resources.

Now, if you're working with a file version of the PowerPoint, slide five will be yellow, and you'll notice that the yellow slides are activities and the blue slides are coded for discussion. I'm not going to

mention that too much again because I know some people are working with printed slides. This slide shows an icebreaker that is a ball catching activity if you want to get people standing up and active. There are more sedate ways to do this—you might have paired conversations that are then shared with the larger group. Whatever presentation style works, the purpose is really to get people thinking about their prior literacy experience, especially as adolescents.

Now, the next six slides are kind of the framework for this. They contain key data that explain why media headlines are busy right now talking about the national crisis in youth literacy. They contain national statistics in the areas you see listed on this slide and they present a reasonably bleak picture of the expectations and possibilities for youth with low literacy skills. So let's take a look at the areas.

On the next slide, we see some statistics on high school graduation, unemployment and incarcerated persons. The first—if you consider the top bullet here, the national high school graduation rates, I need to note that graduation numbers here for 1998 and 2004 are for high school diplomas and based on high school enrollment. They don't factor in GED diplomas, which would probably raise the percentage a little bit, or dropouts before high school enrollment which would probably lower it. Now, what creates the alarm on this slide is that very soon, statisticians are predicting, one out of every three students won't be graduating from their high schools. And, we can look at the rest of the data on this slide to see that dropouts with low literacy skills are highly at risk for unemployment and perhaps even a term in prison. Next slide.

This slide has to do with reading statistics from the National Assessment on Educational Progress. Elementary scores are in the left hand two columns, the middle school scores the right hand two. Now, what you really have to grasp about this is that basic or below achievement are the dark red columns, the longest columns, and proficient or advanced achievement are the blue ones [the short ones]. We would want that to be opposite. As you can see, reading scores show good gains for grade four between 1998 and 2005, but reading improvements for the same period at grade eight are very small. And the really sad part about this slide is that for both years and in both levels less than half of all students are reading at proficient or advanced levels.

Now let's look at writing. I can't hear you gasp, but I hope you feel that when you look at this. Basic or below writing skills are represented by dark red, proficient or advanced by blue. Now, consider that a proficient level of writing is what any kid will need to move up in the world. The positive information here is that writing skills are improving. But, the dismal information is that only 30 percent

## Icebreaker

Catching the ball...

Introduce yourself and answer one of two questions

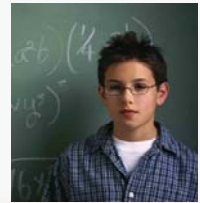
- 1) When I was young, I got excited about literacy when...
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ (speaking, listening, reading or writing) was very important to my success in life when...
- 3) Record on Handout #1

## National Concern About Youth Literacy

Why the alarm?

Statistical trends in . . .

- High school completion
- Literacy levels and incarceration
- Reading achievement
- Writing achievement
- Employment practices



## Literacy and School, Work, Prison . . .

National high school graduation rates

- Class of 1998: 71%
- Class of 2004: 69%

Unemployed adults

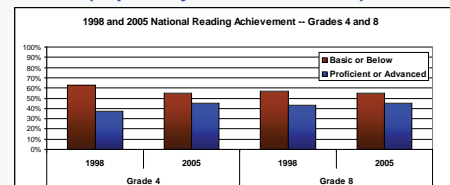
- 75% have difficulties reading or writing

Incarcerated persons

- 70% score in the two lowest literacy levels
- 49% are high school drop-outs

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems  
National Institute for Literacy: National Survey of Adult Literacy 1992

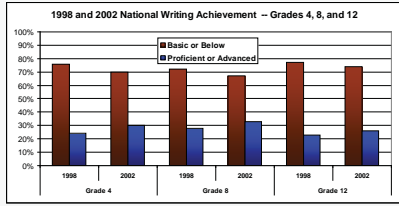
## Reading Improvement Lagging (especially in middle school)



- National results show reading scores are improving, particularly at the fourth grade level

Source: National Assessment for Educational Progress, Reading Report Card, 1998/2005

### Most Students Behind in Writing



• "Almost all students lack ability to create prose that is organized, precise, engaging, coherent or convincing."

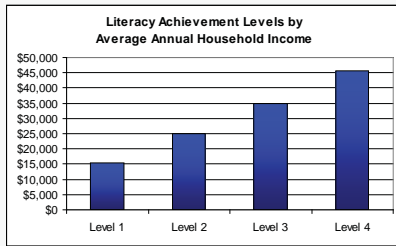
Source: National Assessment for Educational Progress, Writing Report Card, 2002

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of students show writing proficiency. My response to this is if we can inspire youth to improve their own writing given these statistics, we're giving them a really competitive edge in the workforce, so why would we not try to do that?

Literacy correlates to higher incomes, this is the next slide. This is a 1992 study, the only one I could find that shows the relationship between test and literacy level and income level. So look at the left hand bar, that's the lowest level, level one of literacy skills. And, you'll see that the household income is about 15K a year, and then look at the right and you see that adults with the highest literacy levels are in three times what people at the lowest level earn. These statistics really speak to me, so even though this study is 15 years old I've put it in here. I think that the money levels would be different today, the income levels, but my guess is that the relationship between literacy skill and higher incomes would hold.

### Literacy Correlates to Higher Incomes



Source: National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992, National Center for Education Statistics

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Also, next slide, the National Commission on Writing has surveyed government and business human resources offices and found that 80 to 90 percent of salary professional government jobs require writing samples and also half of the government jobs—half of clerical positions in the government sector also require writing samples. And finally, remember that employers, when hiring, are extremely aware of what a low cost literacy worker will cost them over time.

### Writing Skills and Work

- 80% of salaried/professional jobs require writing skills
- When hiring, 80% of FIRE companies (finance, insurance, real estate) assess writing skills
- When hiring, government agencies assess writing for
  - 91% of professionals
  - 50% of clericals
- Employees writing deficiencies costs US firms as much as \$3.1 billion annually

Reports from the National Commission on Writing - *Writing: A Ticket to Work...or a Ticket Out*, 2004; - *Writing: A Powerful Message from State Government*, 2005

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So, what conclusions can we gather from this picture? First, that youth with low literacy skills are seriously at risk for truly undesirable outcomes. And second, if you want to be a good friend and mentor to a young adult and truly build their assets, it makes sense to me that you might—would use every possible opportunity to encourage literacy practice and develop skills.

And now, you're coming to a blue slide—an opportunity to stop for a moment and talk with participants about their response to the data they've just heard. So, for right now, if you have any questions or comments about this data you might consider e-mailing us or making a note of your question for the Q and A session that's coming up.

### Youth at Risk

Youth with low literacy skills are clearly at risk for:

- Low-income jobs
- Few opportunities for advancement
- Unemployment
- Even prison

How can mentors of youth help to build literacy skills?

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### A question for participants

At this point...

Does anyone have any questions and comments about, or experience with the literacy picture we have looked at so far?



Now we're going to move right on to a model of how mentors might be able to work to support literacy skills. The model comes in four parts, and they all interlink the way programs usually do. It's a whole piece of work, but we're going to talk about it in these four categories. First, an approach to planning that could be used by both programs and mentors. Second, ways that you might integrate literacy work into youth activities that you do right now. Third, some straightforward ways to provide academic support as a literacy coach. And fourth, some thoughts about connecting youth with community literacy resources.

So, action one, moving right along here. The planning process entails learning about youth skills and needs, setting goals and then creating a plan for achieving them. This is a little tricky—you'll have to decide as a program where this planning model will fit for you. We recognize that relationships come first in a good mentoring program. So you have to decide after that trusting relationship has established, when planning for literacy needs might be a appropriate.

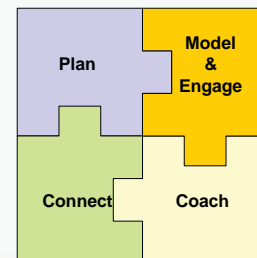
For example, a program director considers literacy needs of an English language learner who doesn't speak English yet. And so, for a match he chooses a soft spoken no-pressure mentor but he finds somebody though who's also a Spanish speaker. Then, over the next few months the mentor builds a relationship and she learns more: does the student worry about pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, has bullying created fear? Each condition requires a different approach and a different plan.

So coming up next are some ways to go at planning. We can think that mentors can have their own literacy support plan somewhat in advance, but ideally they might be able to entice the mentee to create their own literacy improvement plan over time.

First is just through conversations with the youth, and the main thing we all know is that voice and choice are the main hooks for adolescent literacy, reading and writing. So, what can you learn about your mentee's likes and dislikes? Reading activities can be MySpace, motorcycle magazines, graphic novels, music lyrics. Where do they write? And again, what do they like to write? Are they bloggers or IM'ers? And how about literacy resources? Do they have a library card? Do they have a computer? Are they experiencing stress over literacy requirements at work or school that require literacy skills? And, note that handout number two that you have is something that mentors can use to record what they do with this action planning.

The next part after conversations are just simple observations. You can encourage mentors to observe in all four areas of literacy, speaking, listening, reading, writing—all are critical skills.

## Literacy Support Model



### Action #1: Plan

- **Plan for needs:** conduct a literacy profile (Handout #2)
- **Plan your goals:** Target literacy support you can provide
- **Plan mutual goals:** Work with youth to identify literacy goals



### Action #1: Plan (continued) Conversations

#### What can you learn about:

- Reading - likes, dislikes, materials, Web sites
- Writing activities - work, school, social
- Library and computer familiarity and use
- Homework routines or on-the-job literacy tasks

### Action #1: Plan (continued) Observations

- **Speaking** - vocabulary, pronunciation, complexity, confidence
- **Listening** - attention span, retelling, summarizing, interpretation
- **Reading** - engagement, habits, fluency, comprehension
- **Writing** - organization, ideas, vocabulary, voice

Action #1: Plan (continued)

**Outside Opinions/ Evaluations**

- Program records
- School records
- Teachers' concerns or priorities
- Family goals and contributions
- Youth perspective on all of the above

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So a match log might contain observations like “Emily speaks very fast and in complex sentences, but she can’t sit still and listen for 30 seconds. She’s a great talker, but when she read aloud she stumbles a lot and she says she hates writing.” Or, here’s a profile of John, he’s entirely into graphic novels, he doesn’t talk in groups at all, he has bad grades in English because he says he’s bored with the assignments. Both of those profiles would probably entail a different kind of support plan.

Now finally, you can look for outside opinions and evaluations from all of the sources that are listed on slide 18. You can look for what youth records can tell you, they’re not always available to everyone but classroom teachers are sometimes willing to provide some tips. Teachers mostly tell me that an e-mail will work best in communicating with them. Family members can provide a picture from their home perspective of how a student is doing. Your program may have access to some records. But, ultimately you can have, at some point, a conversation with the mentee: how have their grades been and why does the mentee think they’re like that. How our youth interprets their records will provide you with really good clues about where to begin. Then, set some goals to meet student needs.

Action #1: Plan (continued)

**Set goals to meet student needs**

**As a mentor, what can you do, using...**

- Your literacy skills
- Activities in your plan
- Time available

**What does your youth want to do?**

- Areas for improvement
- Approaches that work
- Agreed upon outcomes



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So, I think the mentor can get the jump on this and do it first, but he needs to take into consideration his own literacy skills or her literacy skills in terms of how to leverage them and support the youth. Over time, ideally you might influence the youth to say, you know, I’d actually like to be a better writer, and then you can work on a mutual plan to get that in place. First a mentor’s plan and then following up with a mutual plan whenever possible.

Now, the final kind of caution here is always to consider literacy preferences of youth—that’s the way you’re going to get them interested and engaged. Here’s an example: Dr. Michael Bitz at Columbia University has launched a comic book project nationwide and he has thousands of middle schoolers planning, writing, sketching, designing and producing original comic books. They distribute them in their local communities and some of the issues have themes like “You as a Superhero” and “Your neighborhood as a comic mysterious planet.” Some of these are also posted online at Comic Book Project (<http://www.comicbookproject.org/>), so you can look there and see what the kids are doing.

And, it’s interesting to look at the last bullet on this slide. From a study of Detroit high schoolers, researchers learned that 90 percent of teens read something every week. But, don’t miss what they prefer, the first is websites, next social notes and E-mails, music lyrics, and then books and magazines.

Action #1: Plan (continued)

**Consider literacy preferences (youth voice and choice)**

- Visually oriented
- Look for “real life” –culture, economy, age, and gender
- Inspired by media
- Focused on relationships - peers, romance, family
- Over 90% read “some” each week  
(Tops is Web sites, then in order -notes/email, music lyrics, novels/stories, magazines)

-Elizabeth Birr Moje, University of Michigan, citing three interrelated research projects in Detroit, MI

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So, we've come up to an opportunity now if you're delivering this session to have a discussion in your program about how you go about integrating this planning model into your site, who will do what, when. And, as a major consideration you want to facilitate good relationships first. So, we're interested in hearing from you later about how you might integrate this planning model into your site, so make a note of some thoughts now and we'll go on.

Our second action is just how can you model and engage youth in literacy practice with what's going on in your mentoring programs right now. And, I'm going to talk about four ways you might be able to do that. You may have some other ideas, we'd love to hear them from you as I conclude.

As a parent, I can remember planning road trips with my own teenagers. I sort of wanted them to be stuck in the car with me for a while and I'd always have a plan for what we needed to talk about during that time. And, actually I had probably the deepest most meaningful conversations with my teenagers while I was driving them around. So, my personal favorite of all these ways of engaging students in literacy is just sharing success stories about the importance of literacy and finding some that the youth will relate to. These can be your own stories, they can be about people who've gained literacy skills against all odds—shared stories are kind of the common glue that stick us altogether, teens love them, ELL (English language learners) love stories about people who came here from another country and struggled to learn English. So who are the teen's idols, and what stories can you dig up?

And, I have to give you an example here: forget Abe Lincoln, what can you find out about Shakira? So, I actually went looking for information. I found out she was born in Lebanon, lived in the U.S. then Columbia. She speaks three languages now, but she started recording mostly in Spanish. And, when critics said her English was too weak for an English album she took a year off to work on her English, then she made an album that sold 13 million copies, and that album has that great title, English title: Hips Don't Lie. I got all this information on Wikipedia. So, you can find stories out there that may speak to the youth you're working with.

Now, here is a sharing stories activity. I think it's great to just collect stories in your program. You can undertake it with your mentors (this should be a yellow slide when you have this online.) And, record and practice some good literacy stories on handout number three that's provided for you for mentors to kind of write some stories they might like to repeat.

## A planning question to consider...

How would you integrate this planning model into your site...

- Who?
- When?



## Action #2: Model and Engage

Away from school, everyday experiences require vital and valuable literacy skills

- Success stories (connect to work)
- Daily routines (connect to interests)
- Social tools (connect to peers/adults)
- Pathway to learning (developing new skills)

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## Action #2: Model and Engage (continued) Share stories of success

We live and learn through stories.

Find and tell compelling stories about...

- You and your family's literacy
- People who gain skills against all odds
- Literacy feats of youth icons
- Stories that youth will tell you

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## Sharing stories activity

First, begin by talking to a partner

- Share a story about a family member's neighbor's/ or friend's success through literacy
- Next, think of a hero/star/leader and a story of their success through literacy

- Get up, talk to three people you don't know and trade stories (about anyone – famous or not)

Finally, let's take notes and build story resources (Handout # 3)

Action #2: Model and Engage (continued)

**Literacy practice in daily routines**

Share reading/writing through...

- Newspapers/Entertainment Guides
- Restaurant visits
- Directions and instructions
- Computer use – email, instant messaging
- Field trips to museums
- Personal calendars and journals

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The next part is slide number 25, literacy practice in daily routines. Now, there's all kinds of things people like to read and reading them aloud and sharing them is a great thing to do. Astrology comes up sometimes, and other kinds of things that are listed here. So, if a restaurant menu describes a gut buster or a tree hugger burger, you can read those descriptions aloud and talk them over with the youth, what type might they want to order or what kind of burger would they describe that would appeal to them. Look for movies and reviews to talk about, that's a popular topic, you can read critics reviews of some movie a teen likes and then ask for their response to it. And also, read things aloud as you're going through a museum, or exchange e-mails—remember how popular that was with Detroit youth—about what you remember you liked about field trips you've been on.

Action #2: Model and Engage (continued)

**Work on social tools**

Verbal skills develop through many small activities --

- Active listening
- Verbal manners, etiquette
- Speaking up in groups
- Verbal games and icebreakers
- Elevator speeches

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Now, language is also a social tool and there are many ways to just work on verbal skills and many small activities you can do. I know that mentors often get training on active listening and it's my experience that many people can use this kind of training, including your mentees. So, why not turn the training around and after a meeting that you're in together, talk with your mentee about who were the best listeners, what kind of behavior do you see a good listener showing, what you said, and so on. And then also whenever a youth or a mentee speaks up in groups, mentors can support them simply by saying, "you know what you said during that discussion really made me think," or "that was a great remark you made, it made everybody laugh, it showed you have a sense of humor about yourself." And finally, you can practice concise speech, you can help youth, through little elevator speech activities, present points in a hurry, the kind of practice that we all need, and I'm actually trying to model here as best I can!

Action #2: Model and Engage (continued)

**Learn new skills**

- Technology
- Craft and hobby "how to" books
- Cooking
- Fashion
- Driving

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Learn new skills. Here are— the best everyday use of literacy for most of us is learning to do new things. So, in mentoring programs, I know you schedule activities with your mentees often. How can literacy figure into this? Can you consult a manual together to find new ways of text messaging or read and following instructions for something? Somebody in our office made handbags out of duct tape, that was great fun to get those. Or, make a cake together for a potluck using a recipe or you could work with fashion conscious kids to create new look posters with headlines and photos. And finally, the main literacy job that most kids anticipate is passing the drivers permit exam, so practicing with them on that is also a nice thing a mentor can do.

**A question about including literacy practice in your current activities...**

What activities are currently part of your mentoring programs that could be structured to support the development of literacy skills?



Here's another opportunity for discussion on slide 28. And, the opportunity we would obviously have here is to discuss with your mentors how they see this information we've just presented and what they do with their kids right now where they could include some literacy practice. And, if you have any ideas, jot them down or e-mail them to us and we'll try to get them back to you as I conclude.

Our third action is coaching. Coach youth through literacy projects—this is about developing specific academic skills in the four literacy areas. Keep in mind mentors don't need to be trained educators to help kids with literacy—common sense often helps a lot, and a body of learning research says that literacy skills improve more through peer practice and feedback than through direct instructions. So, why couldn't a mentor provide support that would build confidence and encourage practice?

So, it's good to go over coaching guidelines before you talk about ways to coach. We all can think about bad coaches we've had. For me, sometimes they've been on sports fields—if somebody yells at you or calls you clumsy or kicks you off the field it's not going to improve your soccer game. So, if you had a good coach, here's probably what you remember about them: that they recognized the effort, good job, well done, and they find something that you do strongly and praise it. And then, look for one key thing to improve at a time, not to overwhelm everybody. Suggest things to try out to improve that one thing, provide some practice and pay attention to the practice so that you can reinforce strategies that work. And, having mentors probably practice this system with each other wouldn't be a bad idea.

Now here are some areas where coaching will work, and one is oral presentations and reports for school. Mentors can do a lot to help youth get comfortable so that when they do the report in the classroom, they're ready. Usually a kid will start out, if they're shy, with their eyes rolled into the back of their head like they left their mind in the back room and only brought their body. And so, the first thing you can do is help them relax physically, tell them just to breathe and get used to making eye contact. And then, after they've settled down, work on things like volume and pitch. Can they speak clearly and remember what they want to say? And, you could also give feedback: "I see that at this point you forget what you want to say, what will help you remember here?" Only practice in front of somebody can accomplish these improvements.

Next, listening and retelling. This is a key reading comprehension skill. Always literacy improves with more practice in this. It can be worked on in so many contexts and around so much content, movie, speeches, radio, so that mentor/mentee conversations can be asking youth to repeat what they've heard with varying emphasis on the questions that the mentor asks. What did you enjoy about that? What stuck out? What irritated you? What made you think? Can you summarize what the person said? And, the key response of the mentor expressing interest in the mentee's ideas and reactions not only improves their literacy, but it also helps mentees kind of discover who they are. And, academic focus for this skill can be working together to read homework passages aloud and then asking the youth to recap the main ideas.

### Action #3: Coach

Coach youth through literacy projects (either school or out-of-school) to build academic literacy skills for...

- Oral presentations and reports
- Listening and retelling
- Reading (assignments or pleasure)
- Writing projects

#### Action #3: Coach (continued)

### Coaching Guidelines

A good coach...

- Recognizes effort
- Appreciates what's good
- Focuses on one improvement at a time
- Suggests different ways to get there
- Provides guided ways to practice
- Notices strategies that work



#### Action #3: Coach (continued)

### Oral Presentations and Reports

Enter into the rehearsal process; be an audience when your youth is speaking and note:

- Posture/eye contact
- Gestures
- Diction and volume
- Content

Share what's effective and suggest what can be improved

#### Action #3: Coach (continued)

### Listening and Retelling

Whether you are listening to a film, lecture, music lyric, or TV programs, focus on these skills—

- Recalling plot, details, etc.
- Highlighting main points
- Interpreting perspectives
- Summarizing content

All discussions that ask a youth to mentally review verbal content and re-verbalize it in some way will build this critical skill.

## Listening/retelling activity

First, find a partner:

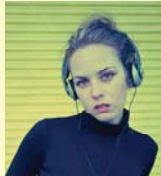
- Decide who will be the mentor, who will be the youth

Next, listen to a reading:

- Find a good "youth voice" selection (about 2-3 minutes) to distribute
- Mentor reads the selection aloud to the youth, or they read it in unison

Then, the mentor interviews the mentee to find out

- How well they can retell the story
- What they identify as main point(s)
- Ideas about different perspectives
- What the writer wants us to get from it



And, here's a yellow slide that provides an opportunity to practice with mentors how they might do listening, retelling, coaching. A key thing about making this activity work well is to find a good reading passage to work with. And, I would suggest that you look in some books that have youth voice in them. There are many books that are diaries written by youth or youth talking about their experiences. I could—I would recommend *The Freedom Writers*, a book edited by Erin Gruwell and what the movie was based on from her L.A. high school students diaries, might be a good choice for you.

Reading assignments—reading either assignments or pleasure reading. Moving onto reading, the most powerful research-validated practice to improve reading skills is reading aloud, no matter what the content. This is the single activity that most effectively builds literacy skills. Mentors can read the selection first, then they can take turns with their mentee as readers or read together in unison. And then, follow-up conversation about unfamiliar words, particularly for English language learners, or different pronunciations—but most important, follow-up conversations, what does the youth understand about the passage—all become important learning moments.

And, remember those writing bars, those low writing bars, the final area is ways that mentors could work on writing without even attempting to create writing perfection like correcting for grammar and punctuation. Mentors can accomplish very important goals, they can help students see themselves as writers, they can encourage them to write, write, write, they can help them get over writer's block through brainstorming, free writing, planning, and they can look over a youth's organization on homework for homework and respond to it.

And finally, if a youth has a piece of writing that needs revision, they can often benefit by support through the re-writing process. Here is a journal writing activity coded in yellow. I think it would be just a great idea if mentors and mentees did some mutual journaling. The more you write, the better writer you are. And, this particular activity can create companionship in the writing effort and do a great deal to improve youth literacy. This activity might open up your mentors to possibilities of journaling with their mentee.

Now, you have a handout number four and I usually work with a poem that I read in this activity that's called "You Reading This, Be Ready," by William Stafford. We have that poem here and we can send it to you if you're interested in getting it. But, you could just find any inspirational kind of kick off thing to read aloud about writing if you're conducting this activity. Then, just let everybody in the room write continuously for three minutes and then ask them to reflect on the experience. What happened in the room

Action #3: Coach (continued)

### Reading (assignments/pleasure)

Through shared reading (novels, stories, news, homework) mentors may find opportunities to improve:

- Pronunciation
- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Comprehension

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Action #3: Coach (continued)

### Writing Projects

Any review of writing may offer opportunities to comment on, and encourage writing skills in:

- Voice (personality)
- Ideas
- Organization
- Word choice

Supporting a student through the revision process-- planning/drafting/revising/editing -- will do the most to build skills

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## Journal writing activity

Get Comfortable

Put a pencil in your hand

Find handout # 4

Write as prompted

Share results



when everybody was writing? What did they write about? Will any—is anyone willing to share what they wrote? Usually people will be and usually the examples are very rich and diverse. And then, ask how this as a regular practice might fit in for your mentors and mentees.

Action number four: connecting youth to literacy resources in the community. Mentor programs can become connectors as well as mentors, like a referral service or a field guide. For instance, if you're working with an English language learner, where are the library programs or the cultural groups or tutoring programs with the same first or native language that can help? These connections work best if you can get the youth to show interest and they agree about it that it's a good idea, obviously.

Now, we sort of think it would be great if mentors and youth can organize a visit together to a community site so the youth gets comfortable and knows how to get there and also maybe is introduced to some people. Top of the list, next slide, is libraries. Community libraries and libraries outside of school are open outside of school hours and provide safe places for kids to hang out. Neighborhood branches in our area have special rooms just for teens with computers and comfy chairs. Libraries are making extraordinary efforts to attract and serve teens. Many have a schedule and a resource for homework help and tutoring. They also have abundant resources: videos, DVDs, CDs and other kinds of presentations. A youth needs a library card and a guided tour of what's available—both on site and online, there are great library resources for teens online as well. So we suggest a library trip might be a great core mentoring activity if you do something like this. Visit, apply for a card, take a tour.

Next, community events. Community events, all kinds, by organizations that do literacy projects. We've listed some sources here, and I'm just going to give you some examples of what these projects have been. There are youth development service learning projects where kids planned an activity, they worked in a homeless shelter, then they wrote up the project plans and shared written reflections. A religious youth group started a website that interpreted the scripture of the week, ideas about what certain passages mean to their teen lives, and a park and recreation class in media production guided students to produce a—this was very popular—a photo documentary including text about their neighborhood.

Finally, we hope on slide 40 that over time the youth may express a desire to improve reading and writing skills. At this point, they're ready for tutoring. Your mentoring program can help by being the agency that knows where to go for these tutors. The tutoring landscape is kind of different in every county or community for these services. Here are common places to begin a search and develop a referral list for your program.

## Action #4: Connect

What community literacy resources can serve your youth?

- Libraries
- Community Events and/or organizations
- Tutoring Services

Can mentors learn about these, and become a referral service?

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### Action #4: Connect (continued)

## Libraries

Examples of what libraries have to offer:

- Teen lounges
- Computer access
- Online resources
  - Book lists and teen reviews
  - College planning guide
  - Guide to teen crisis help agencies
  - Guide to volunteering opportunities

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### Action #4: Connect (continued)

## Community Events

Can your youth's needs be served through...

- Afterschool activities
- Neighborhood community centers
- Parks and recreation programs
- Faith-based youth groups
- Book and music store events

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### Action #4: Connect (continued)

## Tutoring Programs

Communities often provide volunteer literacy tutors through:

- Afterschool programs
- Community colleges
- Local literacy councils
- Libraries

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### Closing questions for you to consider...

Are there other important community resources for literacy that you want to add to the "Connect" resources?

When we conclude, what parts of this session (planning/modeling/coaching/connecting) might be most applicable to your program?



Now, there's a very popular book out called *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys* about teens and how hard it is to get them interested in literacy. I like to think of this *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys* teen connected with a club of car repair enthusiasts looking into community college programs and mechanics and maybe even writing a car column for the student newspaper. That would be literacy triumph.

So here are two closing questions to consider. On the blue side, number 41. First is ask your mentors to think about other connecting resources, unique community resources for literacy that you have in your neighborhoods. And then finally, for our upcoming discussion, the big question, what parts of this four part literacy model: planning, modeling, coaching, connecting, might work best in your program? I'd love to hear what you think about that when we stop for discussions in about a minute.

Resources, LEARNS provides many online literacy resources, they're downloadable and suitable for training in the areas that are listed here. If you want additional guidance through this site, you can e-mail me but the link is at the bottom of slide 42. And finally, thank you very much for your polite and enduring attention. I appreciate it, here's our contact information and I'm very eager at this point to stop talking and listen to you. So I hope we'll have some conversation about this, thanks!

### Resources

LEARNS provides many online literacy resources, downloadable and suitable for training, in these areas

- Communicating with youth
- Tutoring and engaging adolescent readers
- Providing homework help
- Finding books for teens
- Find us online at [www.nationalservice.gov/resources/sites/learns](http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/sites/learns)

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**GARRINGER:** OK, thank you very much Rändi . A lot of great stuff, as always. You know, it's always striking to me when people think about, you know, working with the youth around literacy issues, you always just think about, you know, sitting down and reading things together. And, what's always striking to me is just how much literacy work can be woven into all of the other activities, all of the other interests that the youth may have. And, I think it's great that we're exploring some of these kind of back-door ways that mentors can get youth to be thinking about and improving various aspects of their literacy.

### Thank you for joining this session

Please contact us with any questions!

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So we're going to go ahead and move onto the question and answer session, I'm sure folks have a number of questions about how to best implement this in their programs. So let's go ahead and get out of presentation mode and I'll turn it over to Patti for the Q and A.

**MACRAE:** Thanks, Mike, and thank you again Rändi for your presentation, it was really interesting to me. And, I have to add that I also grew up in a household where my father was an English professor, so we share that in common and certainly the conversations were lively around the dinner table.

We do have just a couple of questions that people have mailed in to get us started. But, I do encourage you to go ahead and sub-

mit your questions as well, and if you want to ask them in person we'll get to them in just a minute. In the meantime we'll just take one or two that have been mailed in. I'm going to read the question aloud and let Rändi answer. And, if any of you out there have any additional responses, we're more than eager, I know Rändi is very interested in hearing from you and trying to engage in a little bit more interactive activity if possible on this call. So, please feel free to share your ideas after she's answered the question.

So this first question is about parent involvement and the question is: in literacy programs for kids who are really little it seems that parents seem to be kind of a key ingredient. And, the question is, is this still important as kids get into the adolescent and teen years? And, do you have any suggestions for getting parents more involved, how the mentor can get the parents involved in what the mentor's doing and what the program is doing around literacy?

**DOUGLAS:** Oh, the first thing I'd say is parent involvement is always important. It doesn't end when kids graduate from high school from my perspective. But, a way—there are several ways just to have informal discussions about this literacy plan with the parent. You might have a mutual training where parents are encouraged and invited to come and learn. Anything I said in this session would be equally applicable to a parent and that training could be very good for them. You'll have to have rewards to get parents to come and you'll have to plan daycare. The two rewards we've learned work are food and daycare. Something for youngest children to do while they're there.

**MACRAE:** Does anybody have anything to add to that? Anybody have any personal ideas or experiences working with parents around academics or literacy that they'd like to share? OK, we'll let you ponder that for a little bit and move onto this next question.

This has to do with the area of spoken language, Rändi. Some kids really seem to see the way they talk as part of their identity and sometimes the way that they talk isn't always the most proficient or the most easily understood by your average adult or your employer. So, how can mentors kind of balance being respectful of that while also trying to teach their mentees how to speak more proficiently and do a better job of that?

**DOUGLAS:** Well, that's a very insightful question. And, I personally am very in favor of letting kids have what they think is their own voice. But, I think having a conversation about acceptability and being able to move into the work force is not a bad conversation to have with kids and understand that you can have—and everybody does have—two languages. The languages they have are their informal languages, and then also their formal language where they're walking into social situations. And then, work with the youth to see if they might be willing to work on that formal capacity some.

**MACRAE:** Those are some great suggestions. OK, those were the two questions that we had e-mailed in. Does anybody out there want to ask a question of Rändi at this time or make a comment about any of the materials that you heard about today?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** I have a question.

**MACRAE:** If you could just let us know who you are, that would be helpful too, thanks.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** My name is Shavon from Cassidy Brothers Big Sisters in Los Angeles. I have a question about getting the mentee or the student out of the—out of the fear of writing because I've worked with students on many writing projects, particularly in poetry writing, and the most difficult part was getting the student to write at all because they were aware of their literacy levels, they were aware that they couldn't spell as well as some of the other kids in the program. So how—what are some ways to get over that hump of the fear ...

**DOUGLAS:** There's an activity called free writing, very often it's just where you sit with a piece of paper and you write continuously without stopping. One of the rules of free writing is that you kick out your critic, you don't go back and correct anything, you just write what comes out of your mind. Usually students that are editing themselves ahead of time have been really intimidated by getting papers back with red marks on them. And, the main thing you have to do with those kids is just find their voice and encourage what they have to say as a person and get them writing because they can always do the correcting part later, you have to get something on the page first. And, you can free write together about things, you can say let's write continuously without stopping and see what comes up. It's a great way to brainstorm for homework assignments too.

**MACRAE:** I just wanted to add, this is Patti , from my own personal experience with my—one of my daughters who was also a little bit afraid of actually turning in her writing because she didn't have very good spelling and grammatical skills. When she was doing homework assignments I would actually have her talk to me about what she was thinking about. And, she had all these amazing ideas and really good sentence structure and everything, but she just couldn't get it down on the page. And so, I'd actually have her dictate to me, and then I would write it down and say look what you just wrote, you know? And, that kind of helped her to realize that she actually did have a really strong and positive voice, and she's actually a creative writing major now. So, I guess something went right for her.

**DOUGLAS:** Oh, that's great. Thank you for adding that in.

**PARTICIPANT 2:** I would like to add something also. My name is Artemis Carter, I'm with Youth Opportunities Unlimited, and I'm a career coach. One of the things that I like to do with my students is to start them off even at the beginning of the school year working with them—I work in an after school program—they get to expect that we will always do a journal everyday. And, it's not a journal that I grade or anything, but it's just to get them into the habit of writing. And, I may some days have structured questions for the journal, other days is just whatever you want to put in your journal today. So it gets them comfortable with just actually writing. And, I do review it, I do read it, but I don't grade it. And, in some cases I talk to them.

**DOUGLAS:** Thank you for talking about that, that's why I have the journal activity in here, there's nothing better than daily habitual writing. And, if you give kids a chance to share sometimes it's very rich and it helps kids understand who they—who they are and who's in the room. It's a great reflective activity.

**MACRAE:** I know that, I think it's Friends For Youth that is working on putting together a mentor/mentee journal kind of activity book in which they'll have both the mentor and the mentee contributing on a daily basis or every time they get together to write down what they're doing and what their thoughts are about the relationship. So that might be another way to do that. That's great.

Any other questions for Rändi or comments?

OK, well, you know, sometimes these things take a while to percolate too, and I really, I know this format is a little difficult for Q and A. So please do think about any questions that you might have or any comments that you might have, and don't forget that you also have the opportunity to share your ideas about literacy or anything else on the ED mentoring listserv. It might be really interesting to start posting some of these ideas about academic activities and literacy activities on that listserv because I think we could generate some good conversations there and I think lots of programs struggle a little bit with how to actually do that literacy work.

OK, if there's no more questions then I'll turn it back over to Mike to wrap everything up. And again, thank you very much for participating today.

**GARRINGER:** OK, thanks Patti and thanks Rändi . Let's go ahead and wrap up the call here. Thank you to everybody for listening in today. And, as Patti said, I think sometimes these topics take a little while to sink in and I'm sure those of you that are planning on beefing up the literacy components of your programs have a little bit of work ahead of you.

And so, as you go about trying to think through this and plan things and implement things heading into this new school year, feel free to call the MRC , get in touch with Rändi if you have other questions. And, we'll give you the help you need to kind of get things setup and start enhancing that aspect of your program. I just wanted to remind everybody that we'll be sending out a short little evaluation of the call here today, so thank you in advance for filling that out.

And once again, just feel free to contact us here at the Mentoring Resource Center if you have any additional questions around this topic or anything else in running your programs. So thanks again everybody and have a wonderful day.



**Handout #2**  
**Literacy profile form**

Literacy Skill	What youth says about skills	My observations of youth's skills	Teacher/parent reports indicate...	Youth preferences

**Handout #3**  
**Stories of Success**

<b>Ordinary folks</b>	<b>Famous stars, leaders, writers, etc.</b>

**Everyday literacy ideas :**

Handout #4

**Keeping a Journal**

*Capture ideas until you are ready to use them.*

<p><b>Journal Content Guide</b></p>	<p><b>Journal Orientation</b></p>	<p><b>Write a journal entry...</b></p>
<p>As you write in a journal answer the questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you notice?</li> <li>• What moves you (amazes, delights, disgusts, or appalls)?</li> <li>• What do you want to remember?</li> <li>• What really matters and has meaning for you?</li> </ul> <p>A journal can contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas</li> <li>• Odd facts</li> <li>• Memories</li> <li>• Questions</li> <li>• Lines and sayings</li> <li>• Images and metaphors</li> <li>• Slang</li> <li>• Lists</li> <li>• Descriptions</li> <li>• Writing experiments</li> <li>• Random perceptions</li> <li>• Odds and ends of all kinds</li> </ul>	<p><i>(Place name and/or content of reading selection here)</i></p>	<p><i>(continue on reverse side)</i></p>

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# Supplemental Reading: Tips and Resources for Program Staff

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While considerable time and resources have been put into helping young children prepare for school and in encouraging early reading success, attention to the ongoing literacy needs of older children and youth have, until recently, taken a back seat. However, in the last few years adolescent literacy has gained more attention. Policy makers and educators now realize that ongoing literacy development is a critical issue as students transition into middle and high school settings. The literacy skills that adolescent students must achieve go far beyond the basic elements of decoding words and being able to read and write in complete sentences. They must be able to comprehend complex texts from a variety of sources and across subject areas, to interpret and analyze the information they receive, to respond critically to what they read, and to draw conclusions and discuss and debate their ideas. At the very least, middle and high school students must have the skills to identify key areas in texts, understand information, and relate the ideas they encounter to other knowledge and personal experiences.

Unfortunately, many middle and high school students lack these skills. Results from the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) test indicate that approximately 25 percent of eighth- and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students cannot identify the main idea in text, understand informational passages, or extend ideas in text.<sup>1</sup>

Educators and policy makers are working to improve programs that help adolescent learners become more proficient in these areas. A 2004 report to Carnegie Corporation of New York by the Alliance for Excellent Education proposed 15 key elements of effective adolescent literacy programs. While the recommendations are directed primarily to the formal education setting, several are also relevant to programs serving youth outside of the classroom. These include:

- ◆ encouraging student motivation and self-directed learning
- ◆ providing strategic and individualized tutoring assistance
- ◆ providing extended time for literacy skill development
- ◆ offering comprehensive, coordinated approaches to literacy that include after-school and community program involvement<sup>2</sup>

For mentoring programs, motivating students to learn is a significant role that mentors can play in increasing the literacy skills of their mentees. Research shows that if students are not motivated to read, they will benefit very little from reading instruction. Helping mentees understand how reading and other literacy skills are relevant to their lives, building on what students already know and believe, imparting a love of reading and learning, and linking learning to their goals and aspirations for their own futures, can all make a big difference.

A well-developed mentoring relationship can provide many opportunities for nurturing love of learning and motivating youth to develop the literacy skills they will need to be successful through their school years and beyond. For example:

- ◆ Mentors can model such traits as learning new skills, enjoying reading, writing and speaking, and being curious about the world around them.
- ◆ They can help young people think about their futures and explore colleges and careers.
- ◆ They can offer praise and encouragement for school-related successes, problem solving abilities, creative thinking, and other literacy-based achievements.

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<sup>1</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education Issue Brief: "Adolescent Literacy: Opening the Doors to Success." January 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Biancarosa, G., and Snow, C. E. (2004). *Reading Next—A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report from Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education

- ◆ They can help mentees become more connected to school by encouraging their participation in school activities.
- ◆ They can support mentees in achieving success in school subjects by offering help with homework, improving study habits, and becoming more organized.
- ◆ They can connect mentees and their families with other needed services, such as tutoring, academic testing for possible disabilities, free or inexpensive school supplies, and basic needs to help them stabilize their lives.

But mentors cannot do all this important work on their own. School and program staff must be fully on board in order to integrate literacy development as a significant programmatic objective. Below are some things mentoring program staff can do:

### Educate yourself and your staff on literacy issues

Your staff may already be aware of some of the issues and concerns regarding school success for the youth you are serving. However, in order to develop a stronger focus on literacy development, you will want to learn more about local data on youth literacy and the kinds of school-based approaches that are already being used in your district to improve literacy among struggling students. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Review national data and reports on current literacy research, practice, and policy. This will not only help you understand the current issues in the field of youth literacy but will also give you the background you'll need to talk with local educators and school administrators about the problem. A good place to start your research is the Alliance for Excellent Education's fact sheets and other publications on adolescent literacy (see resource list at the end of this publication).
- ◆ Review achievement data for the schools you are working with to see how well they are already addressing literacy issues.

### WHAT IS LITERACY?

*The National Literacy Act of 1991 defined literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential" (National Literacy Act of 1991, Sec. 3).*

- ◆ Ask to speak with your principal or other school leadership to learn about their literacy activities and resources, and discuss ways your mentors can support and complement these efforts.
- ◆ Find out what other community organizations are providing learning resources for young people outside of the classroom.

### Clarify what you hope to accomplish and how

Though one of your program's goals is improving academic outcomes, school-based mentoring programs are first and foremost about developing a positive, quality relationship between an older person and a child or youth. Be sure not to let academics, tutoring, homework help, and drilling in specific topics get in the way of the mentoring relationship. Your mentors can support literacy development best by making it part of the relationship, making it fun, and building on the youth's interests and abilities.

Here are some questions to consider as you develop a more focused approach to helping improve literacy skills within the context of your mentoring program:

- ◆ What do you want to accomplish by incorporating literacy development into your program?
- ◆ How will you know you are achieving what you set out to accomplish? Do you want to try to evaluate the effectiveness of certain literacy activities?

- ◆ Will you use a literacy assessment tool to help understand the needs of individual mentees, talk with teachers to develop an individual plan, or take a broader approach that encourages mentors to build on the skills and interests they see in their mentees?
- ◆ Do you want to track the kinds of activities mentors are using to help student improve literacy skills?
- ◆ What resources, both within your program and school and in the larger community, can you draw upon to enrich student learning?
- ◆ How do your literacy development efforts complement what is already being done at the school? How will you maintain communication with teachers, support staff, and other school programs?

## Provide training and support to mentors

Mentors don't have to be teachers to help mentees develop skills in reading, writing, comprehension, and other literacy areas. But they may need some special training and support in helping their mentees develop these skills and to clearly define their role in the learning process. If you decide to have mentors take on substantive academic or literacy activities, their training should cover:

- ◆ Key differences between mentoring and tutoring (see the MRC publication, *Making the Grade: A Guide to Incorporating Academic Achievement Into Mentoring Programs and Relationships*, for handouts on this topic)
- ◆ Definitions of literacy development and what can mentors do to help foster it
- ◆ Where to find activities and resources that help develop literacy skills (in the community, online, etc.)
- ◆ Where to go to get additional academic support for their mentee (your school and community resources)
- ◆ How to work effectively with teachers to offer assistance, learn more about the mentee's

strengths and needs, and impart the mentor's perceptions about the child's progress

- ◆ How to encourage parents to participate in their child's learning through family activities and school involvement
- ◆ How to offer appropriate praise and encouragement to mentees
- ◆ How to help mentees set future goals and relate them to core literacy skills such as reading, speaking, writing, working with numbers, and so on

## Commit or develop resources for materials and supplies

In order to support your mentors' efforts in engaging in literacy-rich activities with mentees, develop a small budget for learning tools, paid tutors, art and other supplies, and the occasional group or individual field trip. Seek out small grants for free or low-cost sources of books that mentors can give to their mentees, such as FirstBook ([http://register.firstbook.org/#book\\_bank](http://register.firstbook.org/#book_bank)) or other book distribution programs. Ask for donations for paper, notebooks, educational games, computers, and other resources from local businesses.

## Develop structured activities for matches

Mentors may be eager to help develop literacy skills but are often stymied about how to proceed when they are actually face-to-face with their mentee. Program staff should make available tools, supplies, resources, and activities that mentors can draw from when meeting with their mentee. Many online literacy resources are free to download (see resource list on p.5), and program staff can draw from these and other resources to develop structured group or individual activities for matches to choose from. Working with teaching and resource staff at the school can also help program staff build a rich and varied set of activities and resources that can promote literacy skills.

Programs in which matches meet in a group setting can develop a few group activities that can further enhance learning through peer interaction and discussion. For example, you might set up a reading club that offers a monthly group session to share ideas and do some activities based on the reading. An occasional group outing, if your budget allows for it, can also motivate students' interest in learning.

It is important that mentors involve youth in making choices about these activities, so be sure that a range of choices is available. Also, always build in some free time during each session for fun, relaxed conversation, and other unstructured activities. Remember, these literacy activities will have more meaning and impact in the context of a solid mentoring relationship.

If you have expectations about how much time mentors spend working on literacy, make these clear up front and develop a way of checking in to see if the tools and resources you are providing are helpful and sufficient. Reinforce the importance of the relationship as key to the mentor's role, and make sure that whatever materials you offer are fun and interactive.

## Develop and maintain resource information

To help mentors in their role as a champion for their mentees' literacy skill development, programs will need to get creative about finding free or low-cost educational resources. Strategies to research include:

- ◆ How to find a trained tutor or other academic support service (your program will likely want to coordinate these services with school personnel rather than having the mentor set this up)
- ◆ Where to go for free or low-cost books and school supplies for children and families

- ◆ How to get free tickets to educational activities in the community (for matches or families)
- ◆ Free programs and activities that are offered through libraries, museums, colleges and universities, after-school programs, clubs, and other community services

## Maintain programming over the summer

Educators have long known that students lose academic ground over the summer. And recent research on school-based mentoring confirms that keeping matches alive over the summer months improves a relationship's chances of continuing into the following school year and reinforces positive youth outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Developing a summer mentoring component with an educational focus can help ensure that your matches will develop a stronger bond and that mentees will be more prepared academically when they return to school in the fall. Some suggestions for summer programming include:

- ◆ Provide a method for regular communication between mentors and mentees. This could be as simple as sending each other pre-stamped postcards, regular phone calls, monitored e-mail or other supervised electronic contact, or in-person meetings. Contact at least every two weeks is believed to be most effective regardless of the method.
- ◆ Develop one or two group activities at a location that offers opportunities for learning. Examples might include a trip to the zoo, science museum, or local nature or wildlife park. Prepare some guided activities for matches to do during the event if they want to, but emphasize fun.
- ◆ Provide projects that matches can do over the summer via mail, e-mail, a special Web site, or in person, if possible. Ideas include keeping a shared journal of summer high-

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<sup>3</sup>Herrera, C., Grossman, J.B., Kauh, T.J., Feldman, A.F., McMaken, J., with Jucovy, L.Z. (2007). *Making a difference in schools: The Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring impact study*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

lights, organizing a book club with an online “chat” feature, or writing a story together.

- ◆ For students who are really struggling academically, locate a summer tutor or get assignments from teachers in subject areas that need the most work. Although mentors are not tutors, they can help the student keep on track with summer academics.

Literacy opens doors for youth—to school and career opportunities, to being an involved citizen, to take on leadership roles in the community, and much more. Helping your mentors nurture literacy development in their mentees can lead to long-term results far beyond the scope of your mentoring program. And by intentionally building literacy activities into your program you can help mentees be more successful in school while setting them on a path of lifelong learning.

## Web and Print Resources For Literacy Development:

There are literally thousands of educational web sites on the Internet, some better than others. Many offer Web-based games and activities while others offer tips and ideas that can be done away from your computer. There are also many organizations that are dedicated to promoting literacy development across all ages. These sites offer a wealth of information about literacy development and also provide links to resources and recommended reading. Here are a few sites that can help program coordinators and mentors get started in finding useful resources.

### WEB RESOURCES

*General literacy resources for program managers and mentors:*

#### Alliance for Excellent Education

The mission of the Alliance for Excellent Education is to promote high school transformation to make it possible for every child to graduate prepared for postsecondary education and success

in life. Their Web page on adolescent literacy provides information on current news and events as well as links to a number of studies, reports, issue briefs, and other resources.

[http://www.all4ed.org/adolescent\\_literacy/issue\\_briefs.html](http://www.all4ed.org/adolescent_literacy/issue_briefs.html)

#### LEARNS

Funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, LEARNS provides training and technical assistance to projects focused on literacy, tutoring, mentoring, and out-of-school time. LEARNS is a partnership of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) and the Bank Street College of Education (BSC).

<http://www.nwrel.org/learns/index.html>

#### Literacy Connections

This site provides a wealth of information on reading, teaching and tutoring techniques, ESL literacy, and adult literacy. Their resources are useful for teachers, volunteers, and directors of literacy programs.

<http://literacyconnections.com/>

#### The Mentoring Resource Center

The official Web site for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug-free Schools Mentoring Grants initiative has many publications and resources designed for school-based mentoring programs. The publication, *Making the Grade: A Guide to Incorporating Academic Achievement Into Mentoring Programs and Relationships*, offers both background reading and practical information for helping mentors work on academics and related areas with their mentees.

<http://www.edmentoring.org/publications.html>

#### National Institute for Literacy

This federal agency provides leadership on literacy issues, including the improvement of reading instruction for children, youth, and adults. In consultation with the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, the Institute serves as a national resource on current, comprehensive literacy research, practice, and policy. Their Web site includes free, down-

loadable publications directed at program managers, teachers, parents, and volunteers that range from research briefs to practical guides.

<http://www.nifl.gov/>

### **ReadWriteThink**

This partnership between the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the Verizon Foundation provides educators and students with access to the highest quality practices and resources in reading and language arts instruction through free, Internet-based content.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/index.asp>

### **YouthFriends Volunteer Reading Guide**

This 16-page guide is designed for volunteers who want to foster reading enjoyment by helping both younger and older students improve their literacy and comprehension skills. It offers basic information about the stages of reading development in children, tips and activities, and a list of resources for further assistance.

<http://youthfriends.org/YF/documents/Reading-Guide2006.pdf>

*Activities, games, and other useful tools for mentors and mentees:*

### **100 Best Books for Kids**

A list of one hundred books selected by the National Education Association as great reading for children and young people. Pick one and read it together!

<http://www.teachersfirst.com/100books.cfm>

### **Funbrain.com**

This site by the Family Education Network provides free educational games and quizzes in math, grammar, science, spelling, and history. It also provides excellent resources for teachers and parents.

<http://www.funbrain.com/>

### **Literacy games from LEARNS**

A variety of games to build reading comprehension and reinforce literacy skills.

<http://www.nwrel.org/learns/trainingoppps/games/index.html>

### **Literary Connections' "Tips for Tutors"**

Activities and tips designed for volunteers engaged in helping children develop literacy skills. Included are downloadable activities with instructions for how to use them.

<http://literacyconnections.com/AdviceForReadingTutors.php>

### **Reading Is Fundamental**

Founded in 1966, RIF is the oldest and largest children's and family nonprofit literacy organization in the United States. Although RIF's highest priority is reaching underserved children from birth to age 8, many of the articles, resources, tips, and activities are relevant to elementary and middle school students. The pages for parents may be especially useful for mentors, as they contain simple strategies and activities for encouraging children to enjoy reading.

<http://www.rif.org/>

(Be sure to check out RIF's "Tips and Tricks" at: <http://www.rif.org/parents/tips/default.msp.x>.)

## **PRINT RESOURCES FROM THE MRC LENDING LIBRARY COLLECTION**

Laird, Heather. *Academic Activity Guide: A Learning Resource for Mentors and Mentees*. Friends for Youth. 2003.

This resource offers a great collection of constructive learning activities designed to give matches opportunities for discovery and learning together.

Olley, Anne-Maree. 2003. *Time to Think: A Guide to Thoughtful Discussion*. Essential Resources Educational Publishers.

This guide offers great activities and conversation starters that mentors and teachers can use to engage students in philosophical discussions that teach critical thinking, independent thought, and logic.



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