Two studies show how the nature of mentor-mentee interactions and the ways in which match activities are negotiated contribute to mentoring styles that influence match quality.

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"I dunno, what do you wanna do?": Testing a framework to guide mentor training and activity selection

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CHRISTOPHER IS A COLLEGE *student who mentors Juan Valadez in a public middle school in South Texas. A counselor at the middle school identified Juan as a good fit for working with Christopher because of their shared interest in baseball. Christopher felt he understood the program's goals after receiving an hour-long introduction to the rules, parameters, and available resources for mentoring at the middle school. But he has no idea what to expect. He does not know what he should talk about or do with Juan. Shortly after arriving at the school, he becomes even more confused. Although he imagined a mentor is someone who*

provides a supportive ear to a youth and plays games with him, his first encounter with the school counselor suggests to him that he now bears some responsibility for Juan's academic success, so he feels the pressure is on him to help Juan succeed in school.

Mentors are often given little guidance in what to talk about or do with their mentees, though many argue that what they do together matters. Like the friendly vultures in the classic Disney movie *The Jungle Book*, mentors often find themselves responding to their mentee's requests for activity ideas with something like, "I dunno, what do you wanna do?" Were one of the vultures an older peer mentoring the younger vulture, Karcher and Nakkula, in the first article in this volume, would have some suggestions for him. They make two hypotheses about the kind of mentor-mentee interactions that foster strong relationships. First, they suggest that relational and goal-oriented interactions are conceptually distinct, with each making unique contributions to relationship quality, but that (at least early in the relationship) relational interactions may be better for children and goal-directed interactions better for adolescents. Second, they propose that for both types of interactions, those that are determined collaboratively foster stronger mentoring relationships, while those negotiated unilaterally (by mentor, mentee, or program staff) tend to undermine relationship quality.

In this article we test these two hypotheses with a sample of 412 mentors participating in the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) School-Based Mentoring (SBM) Impact Study.[1] In study 1, we test whether engaging in relational and goal-oriented conversations reflect distinct phenomena and then use structural equation modeling to examine associations between engagement in these two types of conversations and mentor-reported relationship quality. In study 2, we compare levels of relationship quality between two groups of matches: those whose mentors reported their interactions were typically negotiated collaboratively and those whose mentors did not.

Why we focused on school-based matches and teen mentors

The case study that opens this chapter reveals how the perennial question, "What should a mentor do to have the greatest positive effect on a mentee?" has been complicated by the introduction of mentoring programs to the K–12 school system and the huge increase in these school-based programs over the past ten years. Most research on mentoring interactions has come from studies on community-based mentoring (CBM).[2] Little research has focused on whether and in what ways school-based matches should interact differently from community-based matches. The research that has been conducted to better understand SBM activities (see Keller and Pryce's article in this volume) has been largely qualitative, making it difficult to assess the magnitude of the associations between activities and such outcomes as relationship quality and match length. Further complicating this issue is the growing practice of using high school students as mentors in these programs. This introduces additional considerations such as mentor maturity and experience. For example, what if Christopher, the mentor above, was a tenth grader in high school rather than a college student? High school mentors may need greater direction than adults in how to organize their time with their mentees.[3] Although highly structured cross-age peer mentoring programs have been found to yield positive effects for mentors and mentees,[4] there also have been reports of negligible effects of cross-age peer mentoring programs that offer the mentors less staff support, contact, and direction.[5] In less structured programs, staff may not provide high school mentors with enough support and direction in what to do with their mentees simply because they do not know what interactions to recommend. Guidance from program staff may be particularly important in peer mentoring programs given concerns about the potential for older peers to train their mentees in deviant behavior.[6]

Testing a framework for conceptualizing mentoring interactions

The literature on youth mentoring provides some instruction in which types of activities are most effective for CBM matches.[7] Relatively little, however, has been reported on what activities are best in SBM, particularly for younger mentors. Fortunately, several studies have begun to examine this issue.[8]

Consistent with findings from CBM research, these recent studies of SBM suggest that developmental and instrumental relationship styles appear to be among the most successful mentoring approaches in schools. Although these styles differ in their focus over time, both are collaborative, which may account for their success. Developmental relationships, as described by Morrow and Styles, reflect primarily youth-centered and relationship-focused interactions early in the match that later incorporate more goal-directed interactions.[9] Instrumental relationships, as characterized by Hamilton and Hamilton, start off focused on a collaboratively selected goal but become more relational over time.[10]

In their article that opens this volume, Karcher and Nakkula build on the theoretically evolving activities in mentoring (TEAM) framework[11] to suggest that current approaches to conceptualizing mentoring interactions as either relational or goal directed are insufficient to fully explain the developmental and instrumental relationship styles that change over time. The relational/goal-directed continuum alone cannot fully explain why prescriptive or laissez-faire styles tend to weaken relationships or why developmental and instrumental relationship styles tend to strengthen them. It is not simply that prescriptive matches are too goal directed and laissez-faire too relational. Missing in the equation is the manner in which the interactions are negotiated, or authored.

Unilaterally or poorly negotiated interactions stymie relationships. Prescriptive relationships suffer from mentors' heavy-handedness, and laissez-faire relationships (or low-key matches) have almost no meaningful direction, according to Karcher and Nakkula. In the former style, interactions are unilaterally

determined by the mentor, and in the latter, there is no development of a collaboratively determined, shared purpose.

In contrast, research suggests that the most successful mentoring relationships are forged through reciprocal and collaborative interactions that help develop a shared purpose. Both the instrumental and developmental interactional styles are youth-centered, collaborative, and hybrids of relational and goal-directed interactions (see the articles in this volume by Karcher and Nakkula and by Keller and Pryce). Nakkula and Karcher call this the authorship of interactions, relating, that is, to who chooses. In a collaborative authorship approach, multiple perspectives are considered when negotiating conflict or making decisions about what to do or talk about. In the absence of such back-and-forth dialogue, the mentor, the mentee, or someone else, such as program staff or parents, unilaterally decides what the match focuses on. Karcher and Nakkula hypothesize that the authorship of the activity plays an important role in determining the impact of any interaction on the relationship and on the youth. This framework is based on Selman's theory of perspective-taking skills, which prioritizes the role of collaboration in mature social interactions.[12]

Authorship may be particularly salient in SBM (relative to CBM), where the school context may make mentors like Christopher more likely to struggle with deciding whether they should be developmental or instrumental in their interactions with their mentees. The school setting provides far less flexibility in what matches can do together. Unlike CBM, where a mentor and mentee who share a love of baseball may choose to watch a baseball game, play baseball together, watch a movie about a famous baseball player, go to a library to read about baseball, or simply share baseball statistics and stories with each other, only the last two may be options in the school setting. With fewer options, opportunities for collaboration may be more circumscribed. The result may be a proportionally greater percentage of prescriptive or laissez-faire matches in schools than in community settings.

Little is known, however, about whether hypotheses regarding (1) the distinctiveness of the two primary types of interaction

focus, relational versus goal-oriented, and (2) the importance of collaborative authorship hold in SBM in general and in peer mentoring more specifically. In peer mentoring, there is reason to question whether match-based decisions are better than staff-based decisions. For example, some would argue that staff- or program-based decisions about activities are the best way to lessen the social processes most likely to foster deviant behavior in peer mentoring programs.[13] Therefore, understanding the role of collaboration in peer mentoring is particularly important.

In this rest of this article we present two sets of analyses, both using data from the first multicity, multisite randomized study of school-based mentoring.[14] In study 1, we reveal what conversation topics (relational or goal directed) are most strongly associated with relationship quality reported by mentors. We first test whether relational and goal-directed interactions appear to be conceptually distinct in the school setting, so that we can be certain it is appropriate to separate these foci into two predictors. Then we examine associations between these two conversation foci and reports of relationship quality using a structural equations model.

In study 2, regarding the importance of collaborative interactions, we examine associations between who typically selected the match's activities and the quality of the mentoring relationship reported by mentors and mentees at the end of the school year.

Study 1

Study 1 uses survey data collected from mentors at the end of their first year of mentoring students in the SBM program.[15] The entire sample for whom complete data were available (both adult and youth mentors) was included (N = 412). At the end of the year, mentors reported on the conversation topics they engaged in with their mentees, as well as on the quality of their relationship. The goals of this study were (1) to test the hypothesis that conversation topics would reflect two distinct underlying factor structures (relational and goal directed) described by Karcher and Nakkula and

(2) estimate the associations between each conversation foci and mentor-reported relationship quality.

Participants

Of the 412 mentors in this sample, 27 percent were male. The majority were white (77 percent). The rest were 8 percent Latino, 9 percent African American, 3 percent Native American, and 4 percent Asian. Mentors were both adult (55 percent) and high school–aged (45 percent) volunteers. Forty-seven percent of the mentors and mentees met at the same time and place as other matches.

Measures

Activity log Karcher developed the log of activities and conversation topics for an earlier study (see Exhibit 3.1).[16] The interactions in this list were culled from several sources. First, activities were gleaned from the notes of 344 mentors between 2001 to 2003 in the Communities in Schools (CIS) of the San Antonio SBM program.[17] Second, the specific interactions included had all been reported in the research literature as occurring in SBM matches.[18] Finally, the conversation topics of academics, behavior, and attendance (that all CIS agencies funded by the State of Texas were required to address) were included as well. The following types of discussions and activities are included: discussions about academics or social issues, structured games, sports, crafts, or recreational activities. In total, fifteen options were provided, four of them activities (homework/tutoring, sports, creative arts, and indoor games) and eleven of them conversation topics.

   In this study, only the conversation topics were used. Prior factor analytic research reveals that activities and discussions are distinct;[19] therefore, it would be unwise to pool all four types of interactions (relational and goal-directed activities and relational and goal-directed conversations) into two interaction types (relational and goal directed). Doing so would confound distinctions between relational and goal-directed interactions with those between activities and discussions. Participation in activities also is

Exhibit 3.1. Activity log used to collect data on focus of conversation topics

Mentor's Weekly Record of Mentor-Mentee Interactions

Mentor Name: _____ Mentee name: _____ Date:_____ Length in min:

FOCUS CODE: Indicate time spent on each. Check no more than <u>four</u> 15-minute intervals (total 60 min.).
Example: If you played cards for 60 minutes while you and mentee talked about family and school put a check
✔ under 30 min for Indoor games and under 15 for Relationships and Academics = total of 60 minutes. Then,
Use a (circle) to identify who initiated the conversation/activity: Mentor (Mtor), Mentee (mtee) or both
↓

	The mentoring activities below can contribute to improvements in mentees' connectedness, self-esteem, and social skills	15 min	30 min	45 min	60 min	*whose idea was it*
1	**Casual conversation** (Discussed sports, weekend activities, holiday plans, fun things to do in the community, neighborhood, etc.)					Mtor mtee both
2	**Conversation on social issues** (Discussed current events in the news, poverty, neighborhood events, religion, cultural issues, etc.)					Mtor mtee both
3	**Conversation about relationships: Identify who with a** check: ✔ ❑ Family ❑ Teachers ❑ Friends ❑ Romantic Friend					Mtor mtee both
4	**Listening & learning** (Discussed mentee's hobbies & interests, feelings, or Mentee talked most of the time while mentor listened.)					Mtor mtee both
5	**Sports, athletic activity, or outdoor game (activity)** (Played basketball, soccer, catch, volleyball, tennis, etc.)					Mtor mtee both
5	**Creative activities (activity)** (Engaged in drawing, arts and crafts, reading and writing for fun, photography, crafts, art projects, etc.)					Mtor mtee both
7	**Indoor games (activity)** (Board games, playing cards, chess, Uno, checkers, computer games, puzzles, etc.)					Mtor mtee both
8	**Academics** (Discussed grades, school, testing, etc.)					Mtor mtee both
9	**Tutoring/Homework (activity)** (Helped with homework, did tutoring, helped with reading, library, academic computer work)					Mtor mtee both
10	**Behavior** (Discussed youth's behaviors that were related to problems with peers, teachers, adults, specifically misbehavior)					Mtor mtee both
11	**Attendance and "stay-in-school" discussion**					Mtor mtee both
12	**Future** (Discussed College, careers, jobs, goals, dreams, etc.)					Mtor mtee both

Mentor Notes: Use this space to summarize today's mentoring session in your own words. _____

_____

_____

Who completed this log form? ❑ Mentor   ❑ Staff   **Signature**:_____ date:_____
Mentor / Staff

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confounded with age, because opportunities to engage in different activities differ across grade levels, for example, between elementary and middle school.[20] Yet regardless of grade level, mentors and mentees are free to discuss whatever they choose. Thus, we included only measures related to conversations.

Mentoring Relationship Quality Scale: Match Characteristics Questionnaire, Version 1. The Relationship Quality Scale asks five questions of mentors, who respond with one of five indicators:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, or 5 = Strongly Agree.[21] The scale measures the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship using five items, "My Little and I trust each other," "My Little and I share similar interests," "My Little is interested in the same things as I am," "My Little copies behaviors I try to model, like manners and kindness," and "I feel close with my Little." Consistent with previous research that found the scale to reflect clearly distinct latent variables with high internal consistency, α = .89 in this study.[22]

Method and results

A two-stage process was undertaken to estimate the relative strength of associations between use of the two discussion foci (relational and goal directed) and mentor-reported relationship quality. First, the conversation topics reported using the log were identified conceptually as either relational or goal directed according to the description by Karcher and Nakkula and as described above. Then the construct validity of these groupings was empirically tested through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. After a satisfactory model for characterizing the underlying factor structure of the interactions was achieved, each factor was loaded onto the measure of relationship quality in a hybrid structural equations model. The structural model is hybrid because the measure of relationship quality was assessed as a measured variable (the average of the items in the Nakkula and Harris scale) while the factors were latent variables with measured indicators.

Exploratory factor analysis revealed two underlying factors, but also that two items (discussion of social issues and discussion of teacher relationships) had fairly equal factor loadings on both factors. Indeed, the content of these items shared definitional components of both relational and goal-directed conversations, so both were removed from subsequent analyses. The remaining items were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using EQS version 6.2.[23]

The two factors were specified and allowed to covary. We used the standard fit indices of CFI and root mean square error of

approximation (RMSEA) and found that the model fit was satisfactory, with a CFI greater than .95 (CFI = .96) and RMSEA less than .10 (RMSEA = .07).[24] The chi square estimate was significant (59.96). The two factors were moderately correlated (r = .59). These findings suggest adequate model fit for a two-factor model specifying relational conversations (including casual conversations, talk about family and friends, and time spent listening and learning) and goal-directed conversations (talking about academics, behavior, attendance, and the future).

In the second step, we estimated the relative contributions of relational and goal-directed conversations to relationship quality. This hybrid model is depicted in Figure 3.1. Again, using the standard fit indices of CFI and RMSEA, the model fit was the same as above (CFI = .96; RMSEA = .07) although the chi square estimate increased to 79.19 with the addition of two more parameters to estimate. An examination of the standardized factor loadings of the latent variables on relationship quality revealed that both types of conversation topics were positively associated with relationship quality, but the magnitude of the relational conversations pathway coefficient (.39) was more than three times as large as that of the goal-directed conversations coefficient (.11). This

Figure 3.1. Relationship of developmental and instrumental conversations on mentor-reported relationship quality
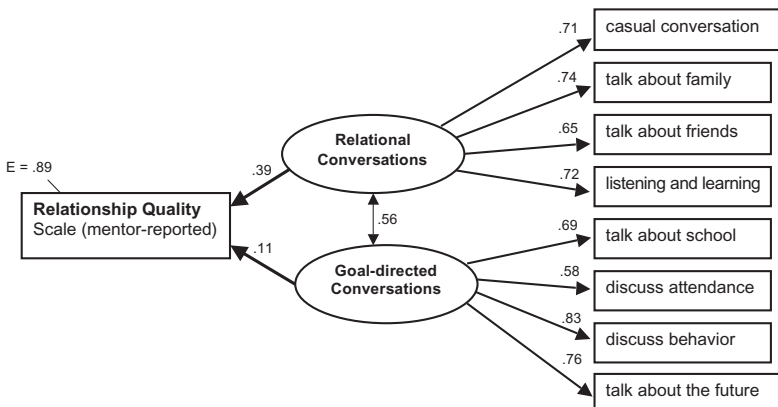
suggests that relational conversations explained more variance in relationship quality than did goal-directed conversations.

Study 2

Study 2 was conducted to better understand associations between who decided what the match did together (interaction authorship) and indicators of mentor- and mentee-reported relationship quality. Because of concerns that teen mentors may not have the maturity to collaborate with their mentees and guide their matches without staff or curricular support, there is reason to believe that match activity selection may play a very different role in cross-age peer mentoring. In addition, the staff supporting BBBS programs often provide more structure for peer-mentoring matches than for adult-youth matches.[25] Therefore, in this study, we were especially interested in the role collaboration played in the matches involving high school–aged mentors; the adult mentors included in study 1 were not included in these analyses.

There were four ways in which match interactions were decided unilaterally (for example, staff, teachers, Bigs/mentors, or Littles/mentees alone were responsible). To provide the best tests of Karcher and Nakkula's proposition, we compared collaborative negotiations (mentors and mentees chose together) with unilateral decision making (anytime one individual decided). We used analysis of variance to compare these two groups on five measures of relationship quality.

Participants

There were 212 teenage mentors, of whom 19 percent were male: 6 percent were freshmen, 23 percent were sophomores, 50 percent were juniors, and 21 percent were seniors in high school. Most were white (81 percent). The rest were 7 percent Latino, 6 percent African American, 5 percent Native American, and 4 percent Asian. Fifty-six percent of the mentors and mentees met at the same time and place as other matches.

Measures

Youth-centered relationship. This youth-reported measure of relationship quality is calculated as a mean of five items, with a higher score indicative of a higher-quality relationship.[26] Scale responses ranged from 1 = Not True at All, 2 = Not Very True, 3 = Sort of True, to 4 = Very True. Items include, "My mentor almost always asks me what I want to do," "My mentor and I like to do a lot of the same things," and "My mentor and I do things I really want to do." The scale had satisfactory reliability, α = .78, in this study.

Youth's emotional engagement. This youth-reported measure of relationship quality is calculated as a mean of eight items, with a higher score indicative of a higher-quality relationship.[27] Scale responses ranged from 1 = Not True at All to 4 = Very True. Each item starts with the prompt: "When I'm with my mentor, I feel . . . ," and the eight indicators are special, excited, sad, important, bored, mad, disappointed, and happy. The scale had high reliability, α = .85.

Youth's dissatisfaction. This youth-reported measure of poor relationship quality is calculated as a mean of six items, with a higher score indicating a lower-quality relationship.[28] Scale responses ranged from 1 = Not True at All to 4 = Very True. Items include, "My mentor makes fun of me in ways I don't like," "I wish my mentor asked me more about what I think," and "Sometimes my mentor promises we will do something, then we don't do it." The scale demonstrated poor reliability, α = .63, in this study.

Relationship Quality Scale. This mentor-reported scale is described for study 1.[29]

Mentee support seeking. This mentor-reported scale has four items that assess the degree to which the mentee talks to the mentor about personal concerns, family matters, school problems, and friendship difficulties.[30] The scale had high reliability, α = .88, in this study.

Mentor-reported activity selection approach.   End-of-year mentor responses indicated whether the mentor, mentee, staff, or

both the mentor and mentee together typically authored or decided what they did together.[31] The indicator of collaboration was, "I got ideas from my Little and then we'd decide together." Three indicators of a unilateral approach were also included as options: "BBBS staff outlined how we'd spend our time together," "I usually decided how we'd spend our time together," or "My Little usually decided how we'd spend our time together."

Method and results

A series of *t*-tests of independent samples were computed to compare measures of relationship quality for matches that decided what to do collaboratively versus those that did not. The number of matches in which mentors reported that they alone ($n = 9$) or the teachers alone ($n = 3$) typically decided what the match would do was very small. To prevent readers from extrapolating the findings to teacher- and mentor-directed matches (whose contribution to the sample would be negligible), we omitted these groups from the analyses. Responses indicating that the Littles/ mentees ($n = 47$) or program staff ($n = 49$) decided what to do were pooled to create the indicator of a unilateral selection approach that was used in comparisons between unilateral and collaborative approaches. The number of collaborative matches was eighty-seven.

The pattern of differences, revealed in Table 3.1, indicates that collaborative matches yielded higher relationship quality than those that made decisions unilaterally on three of the five scales. On no scales did the unilateral matches demonstrate higher relationship quality than collaborative matches. Although negotiation style was not associated with youth reports of engagement or youth centeredness, it was associated with youth-reported dissatisfaction. Youth reported significantly greater dissatisfaction in matches where either the mentee or the staff decided what the match would do. On the mentor-reported relationship quality measures, collaborative matches had significantly higher relationship quality. In collaborative matches, mentors also viewed that their mentees more actively sought out their support.

Table 3.1. Group differences for five measures of relationship quality between peer mentoring matches that collaboratively selected the focus of their interactions and those that did not (i.e., unilaterally selected)

| | Collaborative | | Unilateral | | | |
| | (*n = 87*) | | (*n = 96*) | | | |
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*d*
Youth Dissatisfaction (T)	1.49	.50	1.65	.57	2.05*	.30
Youth Emotional Engagement (T)	3.59	.49	3.64	.56	.62	.01
Youth-Centered Relationship (T)	3.51	.62	3.58	.53	.77	.12
Relationship Quality (M)	3.79	.76	3.56	.86	1.95*	.28
Mentee Support Seeking (M)	3.43	.86	2.99	.99	3.28**	.48

Note: $n = 183$; $df = 1,181$; M = Mentor/Big reported; T = Mentee/Little reported; d = Cohen's d, effect size (.20 = small effect; .50 = medium effect).

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Discussion

The two studies reported here provide fairly strong support for the presence of two distinct types of mentor-youth conversations in SBM as well as for the utility of a collaborative approach to conversation topic selection. Keller and Pryce (in this volume) provide a detailed chronology of the emergence of the terms *developmental* by Morrow and Styles and *instrumental* by Hamilton and Hamilton.[32] And Karcher suggests that a key ingredient in both developmental and instrumental relationship styles is their high degree of youth centeredness, or collaboration.[33] Our studies confirm the distinction between these two relationship styles and support the importance of collaboration. Findings in study 1 suggest that both instrumental and relational interactions make significant and unique contributions to relationship quality, with relational conversations yielding the strongest associations. Study 2 further suggests that relationship

quality is significantly higher in matches that make decisions collaboratively as opposed to unilaterally.

Big Brothers Big Sisters has long promoted the perspective that a highly relational focus is the best route to effective youth mentoring, and the relatively strong positive associations between relational conversations and relationship quality supports their assertion. This study also supports Morrow and Style's argument for the unique importance of a youth-centered, relational approach in the establishment of strong matches.

It may be unfair, however, to use the data collected in this study to argue that the developmental approach is superior to the instrumental approach. Both make important and unique contributions to relationship quality. In addition, it could be argued that two characteristics of goal-directed conversations in this study do not adequately characterize what Hamilton and Hamilton define as instrumental. First, "goal-directed" conversation topics in this study focus more on behavior than on character and competence. Second, Hamilton and Hamilton have emphasized youth centeredness as a key component of their definition of instrumental approaches, which is not captured within our definition of goal-directed conversations. The studies presented here address both elements (goal-directed and collaboratively chosen interactions) individually, but do not consider them in tandem, as they come together in the instrumental style.

The age of our sample also may explain the relative superiority of relational over goal-directed interactions in this study. Hamilton and Hamilton have described the instrumental style as emerging in the context of apprenticeships with older teens, whereas this study included few high school–aged mentees. (Conversely, Morrow and Styles's research was on younger mentees like those included in the study we present.) Therefore, both the content (indicators used) and the context (the absence of teenage mentees who may be most ready to benefit from instrumental interactions) may explain the relatively weak associations between goal-directed conversations and relationship quality. In addition,

it is possible that on other outcomes, such as behavior, grades, or attendance, goal-directed interactions may be better predictors.[34]

With respect to the issue of collaboration, the findings in this study support both Morrow and Styles and Hamilton and Hamilton, who similarly argue that youth buy-in is essential. Results from study 2 suggest that matches are stronger when both the mentor and youth have a role in deciding what to do when they are together. What Karcher and Nakkula refer to as unilateral decision making (in this case, by the staff or mentee) was associated with lower mentor-reported relationship quality and predicted higher mentee dissatisfaction.

Given these findings, it would behoove program staff to consider ways in which collaborative interactions between mentors and mentees can be encouraged, for example, through training of both mentors and youth. Training mentors to use activities that afford such collaboration and then providing them with a variety of resources, such as board games, workbooks, and arts and crafts projects, may be one way to foster collaborative matches. Training the mentees to be involved and engaged also may be important. Karcher, Nakkula, and Harris reported that one of the best predictors of mentor-reported relationship quality in cross-age peer mentoring was the degree to which the mentees actively sought out the mentors' support,[35] and in this study we found that same process was higher in collaborative matches.

Training in the theory and practice of collaboration may be especially important for the cross-age peer mentors and mentees who do not meet in a group format because they are on their own and need to learn how to negotiate. Staff who coordinate group-based mentoring meetings (where pairs of mentors and mentees meet together) should also be taught the importance of allowing the pair to shape, or coauthor, their relationship. Indeed, if both the mentees and mentors in school-based matches could be trained to understand the importance of viewing their relationship as a collaborative enterprise, and staff were able to support these negotiations, stronger and potentially longer matches may result and yield larger programmatic impacts.

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