

Peer Mentoring Among Mature Students

2016 Version

Synopsis

During the assemblage of the 2016 version, it became clear there is a marked paucity in the literature specifically identifying peer mentoring among mature students. Therefore, this 2016 version will identify important points about peer mentoring as discussed in the 2010 version, although to be examined through a lens that appreciates not all pieces of literature examined here directly identify with mature age undergraduate students. There appears to be an increase of literature available on the topic of peer mentoring since 2010. However, it is quite apparent the majority of this literature pertains to individuals such as traditional undergraduate students and international students. This version will therefore examine peer mentoring from an overarching viewpoint, encompassing all categories of students as identified in the literature. Therefore, for the purpose of this review, it will be postulated that the successes or deficits in the literature about peer mentoring found in current and previous literature can be proposed as a relevant baseline for peer mentoring of mature students. Therefore, while new literature is beginning to surface on the topic of peer mentoring in general, it should be made clear there is still additional work to be completed examining the specific topic of peer mentoring for mature students.

Key Points from the Literature

The goal of peer mentoring is to reduce the stressors associated with the transition to university by offering support to students and ease the transition process (Hill & Reddy, 2007). This is a goal that was also identified in the 2010 version.

Peer mentoring programs appear to be supporting new students by decreasing attrition rates (Budge, 2006; DeMarinis, 2014; Kiyama & Luca, 2014) and increasing student satisfaction (Egege & Kutieleh, 2010). Boyle et al. (2010) suggest “mentoring may be both well regarded by students and have a distinct retention effect, which is cost-effective from an institutional perspective” (129).

Peer mentoring has been shown to be statistically linked to an improvement in academic average of first year students (DeMarinis, 2014).

Studies indicate peer mentoring appears to be creating a positive effect on all individuals involved, including mentors, mentees, institutions, etc. (Arkün Kocadere, 2015), through “an exchange of ideas and information between the mentor and mentee [which] is beneficial to both” (Langer, 2010:25). Similar studies should be tested on mature age students to see if similar satisfactory results surface, as presented by Hryciw et al. (2013).

The 2010 literature review acknowledged potential hesitation of mature students being mentored by their younger counterparts (McLean, 2004). However, there appears to be a preference for peer mentors who are other students/peers, versus academic staff (Goff, 2011; Hill & Reddy, 2007). This could be due to the senior level student peer mentors just recently going through a similar experience as the mentees (Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Hill & Reddy, 2007; McLean, 2004).

The previous (2010) version indicated logistical issues (such as timetables and travel time) were a challenge for the mentor-mentee experiences (Saunders & Gibbons, 1998). It could be suggested that e-mentoring may offer greater accessibility for students (Shrestha et al. 2009), in particular with the

increase of online technologies (including online course delivery). However, Shrestha et al. (2009) recognizes while there may be some benefits from e-mentoring; this may prove as a disadvantage for users with limited technology skills.

Recommendations from the 2010 version include a mentoring program during the first year of studies (Penman & White, 2006). A recent study by Yomtov et al. (2015) examined the effects of a first year introductory course wherein some sections of the course offered peer mentoring, while others did not. Yomtov et al.'s (2015) study identified significant levels of student satisfaction and greater integration into university life and academics, versus those students who did not have a peer mentor. The results of the study "suggested peer mentoring helped the students feel more integrated and supported at college, which might reinforce their persistence towards graduation" (1).

According to a number of studies, peer mentoring can assist with some of this by alleviating some of the stressors and anxiety faced by mature undergraduate students (e.g. Hall & Jaugietis, 2011; Pantlin & Woolard, 2014), assisting with the adjustment to university life (Smith & Burton, 2014).

Students using mentoring as a psychosocial aspect find that it helps decrease stress due to increased support, assisting with increased retention and improved grades (Holt & Lopez, 2014; Ismail et al., 2013), as academics tend to be of foremost concern and challenge for many mature students (Kasworm, 2010).

Of the recent literature inclusive of mature student samples (e.g. Hryciw et al., 2013; Smith & Burton, 2013), results demonstrate peer mentoring for mature students is beneficial.

A number of studies are geographically restricted and/or use small sample sizes of students (e.g. Pantlin & Woolard, 2014; Smith & Burton, 2013).

Recommendations

- Increase research in the area of mature student peer mentoring. Most of the literature available about peer mentoring programs examines traditional undergraduate students.
- Include additional longitudinal studies (Ramsay et al., 2007), increase sample sizes and expand on geographic locations of peer mentoring studies inclusive of mature students.
- Future studies should clearly identify the benefits of peer mentoring for all groups of new students and should be explored further, especially in the case of mature students.
- Ask mature students what resources they would like included in the peer mentoring program in order to best support them.
- Peer mentoring programs need to take into consideration the student they are faced with; whether male, female, international, of a particular background, etc. and meet the needs of these students (Langer, 2010) to be successful.
- Inclusion of all first year students in a peer mentoring program with the capacity to opt out of the program if they wish (Hill & Reddy, 2007).

Recommended Readings

Hryciw, D. H., Tangalakis, K., Supple, B., & Best, G. (2013). Evaluation of a peer mentoring program for a mature cohort of first-year undergraduate paramedic students. *Advances in physiology education*, 37(1), 80-84.

Langer, A. M. (2010). Mentoring nontraditional undergraduate students: A case study in higher education. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 18(1), 23-38.

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