



PEOPLE, PLACES AND POSSIBILITIES: INTEGRATING MENTORING AND AFTER-SCHOOL

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Traditional one-on-one, community-based mentoring can certainly be considered an out-of-school time activity, since matches typically meet during the non-school hours. But one youth-adult match getting together once every week or two does not constitute an after-school program as currently defined.

Mentoring can be an effective way to connect children and youth to *people* who are in turn in a position to connect them with *possibilities*. After-school programs, on the other hand, offer young people consistent *places* to go. A high quality program can, in and of itself generate a sense of belonging, and may provide opportunities to explore more possibilities than the average mentor can create on their own. The real question, then, is not which makes more sense — mentoring or after-school — but rather how can we utilize both strategies to increase the likelihood that young people have access to people, places and possibilities, crucial developmental supports that they need in order to thrive.

What is the relationship between mentoring and after-school — two fields that have garnered significant policy attention and momentum over the past several years? To what extent is there movement toward collaboration and integration? Research suggests there is good reason to consider connecting and integrating strategies. From a policy advocacy perspective, there is potential synergy in linking efforts. And on the ground, for reasons ranging from the philosophical to the practical, programs are busy tackling this integration, using a range of creative models.

At the outset, we should note that comparing mentoring and after-school is a little bit like comparing apples and oranges. Mentoring is a specific strategy, while after-school programs are places where a range of strategies can be implemented. We do not mean to suggest that one is interchangeable for the other; our experience and conversations with experts in both the mentoring and after-school fields suggests otherwise.

Years of research and common sense suggest that kids need access to caring adults who are concerned with and focused on their growth and development. We know that mentoring can have positive effects when certain conditions are met such as regular contact, training and support for mentors,¹ conditions that can be facilitated by structures and supports available through after-school programs.

This commentary explores connections being made between the mentoring and after-school fields at the program, research and policy levels, and challenges decision makers in both fields to strengthen the web of supports children and youth experience in communities by finding opportunities to learn from one another. This piece was informed by interviews with numerous policy experts, researchers and practitioners whose ideas and suggestions are integrated throughout.

DOLLARS AND SENSE

