The Effects of Mentoring

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2013
Introduction

What our society needs is good relationships and bonds of trust between individuals.

After sixteen years of experience as manager of Nightingale, I am more convinced than ever that mentoring is an extremely worthwhile social investment; it consistently yields benefits to society in both the short and the long term. For children and mentors alike, Nightingale Mentoring can be a means of gaining access to a wider community, but also a means of gaining greater insight into themselves as individuals.

I am consistently delighted by the number of former mentees that decide to continue studying after finishing school, and whose positive experience with the program inspires them to, in turn, become mentors themselves.

It is also pleasing to note that all across Europe, more than one thousand mentors and mentees meet every week as part of the Nightingale programme; five hundred interpersonal relationships are being developed, allowing for mutual learning to take place, knowledge to be exchanged, insights into different cultures shared, understanding of other ways of living is gained and where a person is granted access to another person’s worlds.

A question I am often asked is: what impact does mentoring have and how do the children and their mentors benefit from the relationship? This compendium attempts to provide answers to these questions.

This compendium is an abbreviated version of a more in depth version and a compilation of different evaluations of the Nightingale Malmö, the Nightingale Borås pilot project, Nightingale Växjö (Sweden) and Nattergalen (Nightingale) Norway. The compendium also features information from various research projects on mentoring.

A longer version is available on the Nightingale website: www.mah.se/naktergalen

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Background
Nightingale is a mentoring programme that started at Malmö University more than 17 years ago, where students apply to become mentors for children aged between 8 and 12 years old. Mentors and children meet once a week, outside of school hours, for eight months, in order to partake in activities together.

The basic idea is for participants to experience mutual enjoyment and learning, and the long-term goal is to contribute to widening participation in higher education. Since its inception in 1997, approximately 2,500 students and children have participated in the Nightingale programme. Many mentors, who had mentors themselves as children, are now in higher education.

The project has attracted considerable interest both nationally and internationally and is currently established at 22 different universities and colleges in Sweden and across Europe. In all of these locations, regular meetings are happening, allowing for mutual learning to take place, knowledge to be shared, and social and cultural borders to be transcended. These meetings create opportunities for a one person to share their world with another.

www.mah.se/nakergalen
www.mah.se/nightingale
www.nightingalementoring.org
What Makes the Nightingale Programme Successful?

An evaluation from 2001 in Malmö shows that Nightingale has precisely structured framework that operates according to clearly defined rules. These guiding directives include: defining the role of the mentor, requirements for the submission of monthly reports, supervision, training and procedures for the selection and matching of children and mentors. Other factors include defining the overall timeframe for the mentoring and the regularity and duration of the individual sessions, in order to allow time for a relationship to be established and develop. The mentoring has a clear beginning and end, and the programme should be considered a high priority by the participating children and their parents.

An assessment of Nightingale Borås has shown that the key success factors of the programme are based on an already proven concept that relies on years of empirical data. The evaluator observed very few obstacles during the pilot period in the practical implementation and argues that Nightingale greatly contributes to the education and formation of positive members of society.

The evaluation of the Nightingale Växjö reached the same conclusion; the project relies on a proven concept, which forms the backbone of the project. There is emphasis on maintaining a clear structure and workflow in terms of recruiting, interviewing, matching, continuous individual supervision and selecting joint activities for children and mentors, as well as continuous monitoring of the project’s basic structuring. The core of the mentoring project is certainly the relationship between mentor and child. But were it not for the support structures in place, and how these are applied by the project, we would not have had the positive outcome and the qualitatively good results of the evaluation demonstrated (Henrik Nilsson 2013, p. 33).

The evaluator’s conclusion was that the societal benefits that Nightingale may have in the long term should be monitored within research that focuses on integration and multiculturalism.

Norway’s evaluation of eight Nattergalen pilot projects suggest that the structure and framework have been very important for the implementation of Nattergalen in such a short time and in ensuring a successful implementation at colleges and universities. The manual provides a clear how-to guide and precise framework.
outline for the setting up and running of the project.

The results of the Norwegian evaluation were so overwhelmingly positive that it was decided to roll out and extend the project in order to maximise the numerous benefits it provided.

**Summary**

**Mutual Enjoyment and the Broadening of Horizons**

The various evaluations show that both the children and the mentors derive great pleasure from their time together in Nightingale. The children say that the best thing about having a mentor is to have someone to talk to who will listen and being able to participate in activities. Many former mentees, even ten years after having been part of Nightingale, tell of how their mentor opened doors to various activities that their parents did not know of, and that they enjoyed trying things that they would not otherwise have done. This is consistent with what several mentors write in their evaluations and monthly reports; they are surprised that their mentees rarely, if ever, go to central Malmö, and mostly do not have much to do in their spare time.

Liaison officers and teachers testify to the joy that the children exhibit when they talk about their mentor. These adults also note that the child’s worldview is often enhanced. The mentees have the chance to try new sports and experience the city’s diverse cultural life. The child and their mentor have made meaningful, fun and mutually beneficial use of their free time.

The evaluation shows that mentoring effectively broadens horizons for mentors as well and gives them a new insight into themselves, others and their environment.

**Co-determination and Increased Self-Esteem**

In interviews, participating children spoke about what they did with their mentor and how they had a say in deciding upon how they would spend their time together. The experience of having an influence in the relationship, being allowed to contribute a respected opinion, remains as a strong and meaningful memory for the mentee even ten years later. They tell of how the mentor supported them, for example, giving them the confidence to talk in large groups, connect with new people, try new activities, etc. This, in turn, contributed to a strengthened sense of self-esteem. Parents, as well as the mentors and liaison officers, repeatedly tell of shy children who become more outgoing, children who have blossomed over the course of the programme. Once quiet children are now happy to enthusiastically contribute their own spontaneous ideas and dare to share their thoughts and opinions. According to the children, parents, facilitators, mentors and evaluations, the children increase their self-confidence and develop in various positive ways.
Over the years, liaison officers could identify girls with limited social skills and confidence issues and observed how they became more outgoing, socially confident and how their self-esteem improved.

That mentoring gives children an improved self-esteem is also confirmed in a research study (2002) conducted in the United States.

The mentors also provided examples of how their own self-esteem was strengthened, how they had the chance to test themselves, their patience and their perseverance. These experiences increased their efficacy, their ability to cope with different situations, and the success of the children also had a profoundly positive effect upon them.

**Improved Social Competence and Academic Performance**

A research study conducted in Germany (2012) shows that academic achievement and motivation, along with the desire to acquire knowledge and social skills, increased in children who had a mentor compared with those that did not. The children with mentors had better relationships with their peers, and their ability for conflict-resolution and problem solving improved substantially. They could also maintain a greater number of contacts outside the family than the other children participating in the study.

Hair sample tests showed that children with mentors had lower cortisol levels (cortisol is secreted as a result of stress). Mentee children were calmer and more interested in school than the children in the study group that did not have mentors. These results that are consistent with a research study from the U.S. showing that mentor children had better friendships, better social skills and a more positive attitude to school, as well as being less likely to get into trouble or fights (Carla Herrera 2004).

**Relationships That Allow for Mutual Learning and Improve Communication Skills**

One of the conclusions of the 2001 evaluation was that the children involved in the programme improved their Swedish language skills, which is consistent with the liaison officer’s 2013 overview. Their improved linguistic ability resulted, in turn, in positively benefiting the child’s schoolwork. This positive outcome, outlined in the ten-year evaluations, was also noted in monthly reports; several mentors mention linguistic advancement as one of the most significant development in the children over the course of their time together.

The Norwegian evaluation also confirms this and says that mentoring contributed significantly to language development in children.
The mentors have also stated that their own communication skills had improved, writing in reports that they had become better listeners and begun to express themselves with greater clarity.

The mentee children have said that they had learned something by having a mentor, but the answers vary; some saying they can do their homework better now, others that they had improved their Swedish or they had developed a skill.

Mentors repeatedly state that, through their experience of being a mentor, they have learned something about themselves and that the insight into the mentee’s upbringing and living conditions have given them greater understanding of how children from different backgrounds live and are raised. After meeting with the child and the child’s family, the mentors have a more nuanced and complex picture of a way of life that differs from their own. Knowledge that many participants believe they would not have been able to acquire through reading or by means other than first hand experience.

In Norway, the mentors have reported that, through the mentoring process, they have acquired a better understanding of children and families with different
cultural backgrounds to their own. In Växjö, mentors stated that they have become more aware of the actual social and economic circumstances of life and traditions for families from minority backgrounds.

In summary, one can say that mentoring creates a context for learning, where the boundary between practice, theory and empirical data becomes less noticeable (Grander M. 2011).

The Mentor: A Positive Role Model
Many young people believe that a relationship with a mentor who regularly goes to school, studies, has high expectations for a professional career and a bright future, can be stimulating. Some former mentees say that their time with Nightingale inspired them to try to follow a similar path to that of their mentor and, in many cases, succeeded in doing so.

Liaison officers believe that mentors provide an important role model for all children, but emphasize the importance of a mentor in helping boys to focus on their studies. They also suggest that the mentor provides schools with valuable assistance and support to some children in need of special attention.

Many former mentees also mention that their mentor proved to be a positive male or female role model.

The Effects of Mentoring on Parents
Rhodes (2002) shows that the mentor not only reinforces the child’s self-esteem, but also the parents’ ability to function better in the relationship with their own child. Tierney, Grossman & Resch (2000) show that parental involvement in the child’s school activities increased and they became even more involved in activities together as a family.

The evaluations show that the mentor has, in many cases, been a key facilitator in communication for the children - particularly for newcomers to Sweden. Not infrequently, the mentor is the first Swedish person that the newly arrived family has a relationship with, and serves as someone who helps them to feel confidence and acceptance in their new environment, and sometimes even helps with everyday activities such as translating letters from the authorities, making phone calls, etc.

A side effect of Nightingale is also to allow parents increased spare time during which they could, for example, enrol in classes or high education courses, as it is free of charge and may provide vital skills and training for use in potential future employment.

Yet another benefit is that the cooperation and communication between the municipality, schools and colleges will be strengthened.
Dates of Evaluation
1 - 2010
2 - 2013
3 - 2013
4 - 2011
7 - 2007
9 - Ibid.
10 - 2007, 2013
11 - 2007
13 - Ibid.
16 - 2011
17 - 2013
18 - 2007
19 - 2013
20 - 2007
22 - 2007
23 - 2010
24 - 2008

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Näktergalen