ED 262 512   EC 180 92C

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TITLE   Mentorships for the Gifted and Talented. 1985
                Digest.
INSTITUTION   ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted
                Children, Reston, Va.
SPONS AGENCY   National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE   85
CONTRACT   400-84-0010
NOTE   3p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted
                Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091 (one
                free copy).
PUB TYPE   Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Information
                Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; *Mentors;
                Program Development; *Talent
IDENTIFIERS   ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT
            The digest considers the operation and function of
mentorships in gifted and talented education. Defined as learning
partnerships between two or more individuals regarding a mutual
interest, mentorships are designed to differentiate the curriculum
through such means as creating opportunities for learner access to
professional expertise in the community, offering real-life
experiences, establising a network of community resource people, and
providing leadership opportunities through tutoring between and among
elementary and secondary school students. Organization is reviewed
for formal (such as enrichment components of regular courses) as well
as informal processes. Suggestions are offered for initiating the
program, including orientation of all parties to their redefined
roles and development of self-directed learning skills. A brief list
of resources on the topic concludes the digest. (CL)

MENTORSHIPS FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

What Are Mentorships?

Mentorships are learning partnerships between two or
more individuals who wish to share and/or develop a mu-
tual interest. The mentor serves as advisor, guide net-
worker, and role model to a learner who seeks to explore
the mentor's experiences.

Why Are Mentorships Significant in the Education of the Gifted and Talented?

Mentorships provide a creative and viable means of differ-
entiating programs for gifted and talented learners.

- By creating opportunities for learner access to profes-
  sional expertise in the community to pursue in-depth
  career and academic interests at competent levels.
- By offering real-life experiences that support the growth
  of the learner's self-concept through the acquisition and
  application of life skills.
- By facilitating the cooperative use of community re-
  sources in more effective and efficient ways.
- By establishing a network of community resource peo-
  ple available to all members of the school community.
- By offering the learner more responsibility in the learn-
  ing process.
- By providing an experientially-based framework for
  enriching the curriculum.
- By involving the learner in the application of networking
  skills necessary for an information society.
- By providing leadership opportunities through cross-
  age tutoring between and among elementary and
  secondary school students.
- By presenting traditional and nontraditional role models
  of competence in the pursuit of and commitment to
  excellence.
- By supporting the development of independent and
  interdependent learning skills in real life situations.

How Can Mentorships Be Organized as Part of the School Experience?

Mentorships can be as simple as the matching of a specific
interest of a student in the classroom with a community
resource or as complex and multidimensional as linking a
number of students with a community network around
many interests or varied applications of one interest. They
can be developed around the type of mentor used. career,
academic, creative, junior citizen, senior citizen or the type
of skills learned and exchanged. leadership training, career

exploration, community resources management, life-skills
development, future problem solving.
  Mentorships can be organized:

Informally: on an individual basis linking a student in a
regular classroom or specialized program with a commu-
nity resource person.

Formally:

As an enrichment component of a regular course.
As a structured option in an enrichment program.
As the framework for implementing a classroom-based dif-
  ferentiated curriculum.
As part of a school-wide community/career education
  program.
As a community/agency based education program.
As a computer-assisted global information network inte-
  grated into any learning experience.

How Are Mentorships Developed?

In selecting the strategy for your school and community to
use in developing a mentorship program, the following
suggestions may be helpful:

- Select students who have the intensity of interest and
  commitment to explore learning beyond the classroom.
- Select school and community resource people inter-
  ested in pursuing mentorships.
- Develop program and curriculum guidelines flexible
  enough to accommodate mentorships.
- Orient all participants (student, teacher, mentor) to their
  redefined roles—students as co-learners, teacher as
  facilitator, mentor as networker.
- Develop communication skills—telephone skills, inter-
  view skills, small group process skills, letter writing
  skills, contract learning skills, and journal writing skills.
- Develop community research skills—data collection,
  analysis, and presentation.
- Develop self-directed learning skills—decision making,
  problem solving, critical thinking, creative thinking,
  effective communication, and self-evaluation.
- Establish a community-based component of linking
  agencies (volunteer bureaus) that can facilitate access
  to available and receptive people and print resources.
- Make evaluation a shared process among the learner,
  the mentor, and the teacher, with clear and precise
  guidelines mutually agreed upon. Both the program and
  process should be evaluated on an individual and group
  basis, using the techniques of quantitative and qualita-
  tive evaluation, as well as summative and formative eva-

luation. Because mentorships are a personal learning experience, self-evaluations can play an important role in communicating the value of the experience.

Further Considerations

- Mentorships are negotiated learning experiences which require commitment and compatibility from all participants.
- Mentors enrich program and personnel. Their interests and expertise supplement rather than replace the teacher and the curriculum.
- Mentorships take time to develop as learning partnerships.
- Mentorships are an example of experientially-based learning in which as much can be learned from mistakes as from unqualified successes.
- Mentorships are not displaced classrooms but unique learning situations, characterized by unpredictability, energy, and surprise!

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