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INFORMAL MENTORING BY TEACHERS: STRATEGIES TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY LEARNERS AT RISK

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This article presents ways in which informal mentoring relationships between teachers and students can influence the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement of students who are at-risk and prevent them from dropping out of school. First, a definition of informal mentoring relationships is provided, as well as a rationale for their application in secondary schools. Then, to better understand how informal mentoring relationships can help those students who are at-risk, attachment theory and brain research are used to explain why students drop out of school and what is needed to build resilience within them. Next, a theoretical model of a mentoring relationship is presented that explains the nature of emotional bonds formed between teachers and students. Strategies that teachers can use to establish themselves as informal mentors to struggling students are then provided as a way for teachers to influence student emotion and increase academic resilience. Finally, the effects of informal mentoring relationships between teachers and students on student engagement are shown in order to understand how an emotional connection with a caring teacher can lead to increases in student academic achievement.

Keywords: Informal mentoring, Student engagement, Students at risk.

Introduction

Throughout history, a mentor has been defined as a trusted counselor or guide. Mentors have the ability to profoundly impact those with whom they are able to form emotional bonds. With as many as one third of students failing to graduate from high school each year in the United States, it appears the time has come for secondary teachers to serve as mentors to our most troubled students. In a recent meta-analysis conducted to assess the impact of mentoring programs, it was determined that mentoring is an effective intervention strategy in promoting developmental outcomes in the lives of young people (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). These formal programs have shown the ability to have a positive effect on students in the form of increased academic achievementbut have inherent limitations due to the school environment and a limited supply of mentors (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002;Rhodes, Liang & Spencer, 2009). While the best school-based programs have been shown to produce positive effects in challenging students, many teachers find themselves in schools without formal programs but with students who are in dire need of an emotional bond with an adult. Students who are at-risk may be in need of a caring adult to serve as a secondary attachment figure in place of parents or family who may have failed to provide adequate developmental supportconnections (Van Ryzin, 2010). Current research on the interconnectedness of emotion and cognition can explain the importance of influencing the

emotions of students through mentoring to impact academic achievement(Beer, Knight, &D'Esposito, 2006). Teachers have the ability to form informal mentoring relationships with students that build resilience and increase engagement. By exploring the nature of mentoring relationships and how they can be formed with students, teachers can gain the ability to positively influence the lives of young people and allow for their future success.

Rationale for Informal Mentoring of Students by Teachers

Most successful people can point to a caring adult who helped them navigate the challenges of life while they were in their youth. This caring individual may have been a family member, teacher, or community member who took a special interest in their development and served as a guide into adulthood. For these successful people, it would be difficult to imagine achieving success without the help of this mentor figure. James is a tenth grade student who has a volatile relationship with his father and rarely sees his mother. When his report card is mailed home he is the one who opens it, and when he considers dropping out of school in order to get a full-time job he has no one with whom he can discuss this decision. Many of the students who are currently struggling in our nation's schools and are at-risk for dropping out are without a caring adult who can provide the support and care necessary to become successful. Aninformal mentoring relationship in a school setting is a trusted relationship between a student and a teacher from the student'ssocial network that provides guidance, support, and encouragement (McCluskey,Noller, Lamoureux, &McCluskey, 2004; Schwartz, Lowe, & Rhodes, 2012). If teachers are able to form informal mentoring relationships with students who are at-risk, then students such as James may find themselves with a caring adult in their lives who can serve as a trusted guide and encourage them to become successful.

Informal mentoring relationships are a way for teachers to form emotional bonds with specific students who demonstrate serious behavioral or academic problems (Shulkind& Foote, 2009). These relationships allow for the teacher's role to extend beyond the traditional instructional model and provide academic and social support to students who they determine are in need of significant help (Phillippo, 2010). Aninformal mentoring relationship between a teacher and student can be characterized by the teacher (1) supporting student progress, (2) knowing and caring for the student, (3) promoting open communication, (4) being a listener and advice giver, (5) improving student academic performance (Shulkind& Foote, 2009). These relationship characteristics certainly extend beyond what may be thought of as the traditional role of a teacher, but traditional teacher behaviors often donot alter the behaviors of many students at risk.The emotional bond that is built between a mentor teacher and student protégé has the ability to createan attachment relationship that neutralizes the effects of environmental risk factors and improves academic, social, and emotional abilities (Komosa-Hawkins, 2012; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, &Notaro, 2002).

For a teacher, assuming the role of mentor will be time consuming and emotionally draining. This mentor role may take the teacher far away from his or her traditional classroom duties and require a strong commitment for multiple years. Not every teacher has the time or emotional ability to form and maintain this type of relationship with students. While school-based mentoring programs have been shown to have a positive effect on student outcomes, they are an attempt to artificially replicate the benefits that can occur as the result of informal mentoring relationships (Dubois, 2011). As community-based mentoring programs move to school settings, severe limitations develop that restrict their success including the number of quality mentors available and relationships ending prior to the 12 months necessary to have positive effects due to the length of the school year (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Wood &Leck, 2008). Informal mentoring relationships between teachers and students have the ability to circumvent the problems that formal school-based programs bring. Allowing teachers to develop such relationships naturally eliminates the problem of finding qualified individuals and the frequent contact they have with students reduces the amount of time necessary for the relationship to achieve positive results (Van Ryzin, 2010). The quality of the relationship and the effects that it has on the student are

totally dependent on the quality of the teacher and the behaviors that he or she exhibits (Vannest et al., 2008). Informal mentoring relationships should be explored by those teachers who encounter students who are in need of more help than their current school structure can provide.Garnering the skills necessary to form informal mentoring relationships is a way for these special teachers to become individual social forces of change and positively impact the lives of youth who are in need.

Characteristics of Students Who Drop Out of School

In order for teachers to help students who are at-risk,it is important to firstunderstand what factors lead to students' difficulties with school.It should come as no surprise that those students who leave school early cite boredom, poor attendance, and failing grades as the primary reasons for their decision (Azzam, 2007). In addition, students who have an emotional or behavioral disability are twice as likely to leave school early as compared to their general education counterparts (Monrad, 2007). Thus, students who have been identified as being at-risk for dropping out of school exhibit behaviors that indicate they are poor students. While schools and teachers are proficient at identifying risk factors for students dropping out, they often struggle with reversing these trends and building resilience within them. Intervention strategies for students at-risk typically address exhibited negative behaviors while the causes of those behaviors go unchecked. Recent brain research on the interconnectedness between emotion and cognition sheds light on the causes of negative behavior and the performance of students at-risk (Beer, Knight, D'Esposito, 2006).

Students who are at-risk either behaviorally or academically often arrive at school with emotional problems that are the direct result of their external environment.These problems cause them to be disengaged emotionally, which then limits behavioral or cognitive engagement. Students report that two of their primary reasons for dropping out of school are poor grades and boredom, which indicates that they were not successful and came to believe they could not succeed (Azzam, 2007). Schools and teachers who attempt to raise student effort and achievement without considering the emotional state of these students are making a mistake. To attempt to alter the behavioral or cognitiveengagement of students without addressing their emotional engagementis to go against what is known about how the human brain functions (Doicos, Iordan, &Doicos, 2011). Brain study reveals that emotion and cognition are directly related. As a result, students do not have the ability to separate how they feel from their ability to learn. A student's ability tocomply with rules, put forth effort, and learn has been shown to be directly related to their emotional state (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, &Salovey, 2012).Teachers have the potential to alter the emotional state of students in ways that can lead to effort and achievement. One proven method of increasing the emotional engagement of students is through the establishment of a quality mentoring relationship, but such relationships are difficult to build due to the inherent nature of students who are at-risk.

Students who drop out of school also report that it was a lack of a supportive adult in the school community that led to their decision to quit (Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, & Royer; Knesting, 2008). A student may be crying out for help on the inside, but their exhibited behaviors often prevent teachers from forming any type of bond with them that would provide the help they need (Nurmi, 2012). According to attachment theory, it is much more difficult for teachers to form attachment relationships with those students who have had poor personal relationships in their past or present (Granot, &Mayseless, 2001). An unreliable caregiver often leads to insecurity that forms a mental attachment model in the student that is resistant to change. A teacher who then attempts to become a secondary attachment figure must overcome issues of insecure attachment in the student. However, a recent study by Van Ryzin (2010) reveals that students can come to see teachers as secondary attachment figures, which is significant because with the construction of an attachment relationship comes the ability to influence emotional engagement.As teachers realize the problems some students have with attachment, they can then continue to apply relationship-building strategies even though the student does not seem to be

receptive to them. The time required to build an emotional connection will be dependent on the individual attachment model that the student has constructed.

Theoretical Model of Teacher-Student Relationships

To understand the dynamics of relationships between teachers and students, a theoretical model of informal mentoring relationships between teachers and students is presented. In this model, the behaviors of the teacher are essential in determining the quality of the relationship with the student. It is important to note that the teacher is not the sole component of the equation, and the behaviors and perception of the student must also be considered when examining how an emotional bond is established. Teachers who wish to serve as informal mentors to students who are at-risk will likely first encounter them in the classroom, and it is the behaviors and perceptionof the teacher that will determine the overall nature of the relationship.

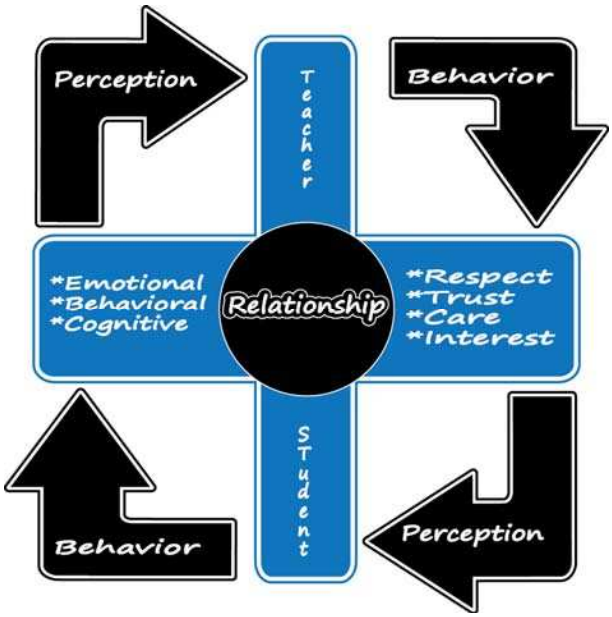


Figure 1. Relationship model.

Stage 1: The teacher is ultimately responsible for guiding the relationship with the student. The teacher must build trust, demonstrate interest and care, and maintain high expectations in order for anemotional bond to be established. This first step is extremely significant in that the teacher has to display the positive relationship building behaviors without regard for the behaviors that the student exhibits.

Stage 2: As all students are different, bringing a unique set of experiences with them to school, they will each perceive the behaviors of the teacher in a unique way. The most significant factor in determining the engagement of the student is this perception of the teacher's behaviors, not the behaviors themselves (Hughes, 2011). Teachers must be aware of the significance of this perception and attempt to understand their own behaviors from the perspective of their students.

Stage 3: After the teacher behaviors have been perceived by the students, these students then exhibit behaviors of their own in the form of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. It is hoped that the student behaviors will reflect the influence that the teacher behaviors have on their emotional state.

However, it may take time for this influence to become apparent in the behaviors of the student, and teachers must be patient and continue to exhibit positive behaviors.

Stage 4: Teachers who are able to have the most success in employing this model will be the least influenced by a lack of perceived student engagement. It is often effortless for teachers to have positive relationships with students who are well behaved and motivated to participate in learning activities. However, teachers who have a high emotional intelligence will be able to look past a lack of engagement in students and utilize the suggested strategies unconditionally (Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes, &Schutz, 2012).

Strategies to Build Positive Emotional Relationships with Students

Teachers can become informal mentors to students at-risk, but the establishment and maintenance of this relationship is often difficult and time consuming. It is important to understand that the behaviors described here will work to establish positive relationships with all students, not just those who may be described as being at-risk. Teachers who identify students who exhibit severe behavioral or academic problems can work to build positive emotional bonds with them. These strategiesprovide a starting point for teachers who wish to help students who are struggling to survive in the secondary school environment. The application of the following methods will allow teachers to become informal mentors to difficult students. The ability of the teacher to then use this relationship to influence the behavior of the student and bring about change extends beyond the basic strategies presented here. These strategies will allow the teacher to forman emotional base from which they can then build themselves into a trusted guide to help the student successfully reach adulthood.

1. Respect all Students and Believe that they can be Successful

Before aninformal mentoring relationship be can be built, teachers must first respect who students are as people and believe they have the ability to be successful. Some teachers display a lack of respect for students by assuming that their position of assumed authority allows them to act in ways that harm students. According to the concept of respect-due presented by Goodman (2009), a basic level of respect is due to all students, and teachers must never act in a way that is damaging to a student's dignity. A teacher who walks down the hall with a colleague, looks toward a group of students in front of her and says, "I wonder what the dregs of society are going to be wearing now that the weather is getting nice" does not demonstrate a base level of respect for the students she teaches. This lack of respect will serve as a blockade in any attempt to establish a mentoring relationship. One component of respecting students is also believing that all students have the ability to achieve. If students have a history of underperforming academically or behaving poorly, teachers often may assume that they do not have the ability to succeed. Students' successes have been linked to their teacher's beliefs about their ability (Davis &Dupper, 2004). Students are able to perceive their teachers' beliefs about their ability, which impacts the way they view those teachers (Baker, 1999). Mr. Ryan, an eleventh grade English teacher, uses an abbreviated curriculum with basic lessons because as he says, "These kids just wouldn't be able to handle anything else. Why would I waste my time designing lessons that they aren't going to care about?" If teachers do not genuinely respect their students and know that they can become successful, the strategies for building informal mentoring relationships are meaningless. The emotions of the teacher cannot be artificial and the relationship-building activities that they engage in must be authentic if they are to be effective.

2. Prove Trustworthiness to Students

The establishment of trust is one of the essential components in the construction of a mentoring relationship between teachers and students. Teachers who believe that students inherently view them

asauthority figures, automatically commanding respect, will have a difficult time forming a connection with them. The authority of the teacher, having the ability to influence student's behavior, is earned through the establishment of trust. Absent of trust, the teacher is someone who has no authority and students will be much less inclined to follow his or her directives (Gregory &Ripsky, 2008). Teachers are able to earn the trust of students through a fair application of power. By using a relational approach to discipline, teachers can treat students in a just way, demonstrating to them that they are in fact trustworthy (Gregory &Rispky, 2008). Steven, a ninth grader who has been expelled from his previous two schools for altercations with students and teachers, enjoys talking to his History teacher, Mr. Cole, after class because he says he "seems cool and doesn't hassle everyone about rules that don't matter."In one study, teachers who had better relationships with their students were less reactionary to minor classroom disruptions and had fewer established rules. Less effective teachers tend to have more rules and are more reactive to even minor student actions (Noltemeyer, Kunesh, Hostutler, Frato, &Sarr-Kerman, 2012). Teachers will not build trust with their students if they are constantly disciplining them for minor infractions. Instead, the best teachers are able to discern between minor and major discipline infractions and stop major infractions before they start (Elliott, 2009). If a teacher is able to demonstrate to students that they are trustworthy, then the potential to establish a mentoring relationship emerges. In order for a student to trust a teacher and allow for that teacher to have a say in what behaviors they will engage in, he or she must first believe that this teacher has his or her best interests in mind.

3. DemonstrateCare

Students who are behaviorally or academically at-risk are most likely in a situation where they need more than just kind words from a teacher to succeed in school. Teachers can provide care to struggling students in the form of direct support for problems they may be experiencing. Students can sense the care provided by a teacher and if they openly receive it, an emotional connection with the teacher can be made.The difference between caring about and caring for is action. While most teachers indicate they care about their students, the same students indicate that they have no teachers who care for them. Thus teachers should come to understand that caring for is not an abstract idea but an active process that provides real support to the student. Teachers must demonstrate their care for students through specific actions for it to be received (Shevalier& McKenzie, 2012). The goal of all teachers, which is the basis for demonstrating care, should be to have warm, positive interactions with students (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). The general idea to demonstrate care for students is to provide support to those who are struggling either academically or personally. Tim, a student in Mr. Jones'10th grade Art class, is in danger of failing his history class. Mr. Jones becomes aware of Tim's poor grade after asking him how he is doing in his other classes and begins to tutor him each morning before school. During these tutoring sessions, Tim begins to have conversations with Mr. Jones about his life outside of school.If students are coming to school from environments that are unsafe or damaging, then the care received from a teacher is necessary in helping them to develop positive feelings about school and teachersto increase their behavioral engagements.

Table 1. Demonstrating Care.

Concept	**Action**	**Research**
Be friendly	▪ Smile, ▪ Laugh, ▪ Be happy, ▪ Greet in students in the hallway, learn student names quickly, ▪ Show sensitivity	Shevalier& McKenzie, 2012;Knesting, 2008; Powell, 2011;Beishuizen, Hof, Putten, Bouwmesster, &Asscher, 2001
Notice and appreciate student	▪ Learn unique abilities ▪ Discuss talents with	Shevalier& McKenzie,

talent	student ▪ Highlight talents in front of class	2012;Marsh, 2012
Provide relaxed classroom atmosphere	▪ Regulate personal emotions ▪ Speak calmly ▪ Use humor that relates to student's lives in lessons and personal interactions	Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes, &Schutz, 2012;Shevalier& McKenzie, 2012;Powell, 2011; Bondy,2007
Allow students to know you	▪ Talk to students about personal experiences ▪ Share stories ▪ Discuss shortcomings, fears	Knesting, 2008; Bondy, 2007
Create a safe environment	▪ Eliminate all sarcasm and putdowns ▪ Allow students opportunity to learn about their classmates	Bondy, 2007; Marsh, 2012

Table 2. Demonstrating Interest.

Concept	**Action**	**Research**
Listen	▪ Listen to student problems, concerns, and stories	Powell, 2011
Informal conversations	▪ Ask students about friends, family ▪ Learn about likes, dislikes ▪ Learn about personal interests	30, Knesting, 2008; Shevalier& McKenzie, 2012
Personal attention	▪ Provide 1 on 1 help to student ▪ Show interest in academic success by visiting during class and offering personal assistance	McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010

4. Demonstrate Interest

Before students will be interested in what a teacher is saying to them, they must know that the teacher is interested in them. Most of all, students desire a teacher who is interested in and will listen to whatever it is they have to say (Knesting, 2008). This interest has to extend beyond the classroom and allow students to know that the teacher is concerned with who they are as a person, not just as a student. Students want to have a teacher who knows them personally and is concerned with their needs (Marsh, 2012). If students know their teachers are interested in them, they will come to understand that the teacher's attempt to support them through a caring relationship is genuine. While taking an interest in the personal lives of students is an important relational building behavior, teachers must be careful not to make students feel as if they have infringed on their privacy, which can be damaging to the overall relationship (Phillippo, 2012). During Ashley's varsity girls' basketball game, she glances into the stands and notices her Family and Consumer Science Teacher, Mrs. Johnson. The next day at school, Mrs. Johnson takes a

minute at the beginning of class to congratulate Ashley for her strong performance during the game and encourages the other students to attend the next game and support their classmate. Teachers whoare able to get to know their students on a personal level will demonstrate that their interest extends beyond the curriculum and into their personal well-being. If students come to realize this interest, they will then be interested in the curriculum that the teacher is presenting as it will be understood as something that can contribute to their overall well-being.

5. Maintain High Expectations

When teachers have high expectations for their students and then require them to work hard in order to meet those expectations, they are communicating care. The idea of holding students to high academic standards is related to the previous concept of believing that all students have the ability to achieve. If teachers truly believe that students can succeed, then they should do everything they can to ensure that they do. Students are able to perceive teacher expectations for them, and they are able recognize those teachers who believe they can reach high levels. Many students who are at-risk will come to teachers with poor grades and little desire to improve. The natural reaction for teachers who are attempting to build a mentoring relationship with a student who is at-risk is to attempt to make things easier for them. However, in order for a mentor teacher to truly support a student who is struggling, they must hold them to a high academic standard and then provide support which will build student resilience (Lessard et al., 2009). One of the most difficult tasks an informal mentor teacher will perform is to translate an emotional bond with a student into academic success. The mentor must always be aware that improved academic performance is the ultimate goal and to allow anything less from the student is not beneficial to the student or the relationship.

Table 3. Maintaining High Expectations.

Concept	**Action**	**Research**
Maintain high academic standards	▪ Do not lower expectations for students who are struggling to achieve	Muller, 2001
Provide high-level learning activates	▪ The curriculum and activities should be the same as for high-achieving students ▪ Present material in an energetic and enthusiastic way	Muller, 2001
Provide support	▪ Teachers must make themselves available to provide extra help with work ▪ Teacher must support persistence and not accept work that is of an unacceptable level	Knesting, 2008; Bondy, 2007; Fredricks et al., 2004; Marsh, 2012

Mentoring Relationships and Student Engagement

The effects that informal mentoring relationships can have on students can be described in terms of student engagement. The current literature presents three types of student engagement that can be

increased through positive relationships between teachers and students. These types of student engagement are emotional, behavioral, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004). Teachers can think of these areas of engagement as how students feel, how they behave, and how they think. A student who is at-risk is likely to harbor negative emotions toward school and his or her teachers. These negative emotions can be altered and the student can come to have positive feelings about school as the result of a relationship with a caring teacher. Positive emotional engagement should then lead to an increase in behavioral engagement in the form of compliance and effort that often results in increases in cognitive engagement in the form of academic achievement. Teachers have the ability to influence all three of these areas by learning and applying the skills to build informal mentoring relationships (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, &Loyd, 2008).

Emotional Engagement

The emotional engagement of students is significant in that how students feel will directly impact their behavior. The emotional engagement of a student refers to how the student feels about school, their teachers, and the work provided (Fredricks et al., 2004). The actions of teachers directly influence this emotional engagement and have been shown to be related to feelings of school satisfaction in students (Baker, 1999). The existence of external or internal problems in students'lives results in them having less closeness to their teachers (Nurmi, 2012). This lack of closeness is an indication that some students deal with life situations that restrict their ability to have positive emotional responses at school. However, if the emotional engagement of students is important in determining their success, then the role of the teacher in improving it is even more significant. Teachers must be able to accept that some students will initially exhibit little emotional engagement and then work to build positive emotions in students through the proper relationship building strategies.

Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement can be thought of as the student's willingness to engage in the activities that the teacher presents. A positive relationship between teacher and student has been shown to have a significant effect on this behavioral engagement (Roorda, Koomen, Split, &Oort, 2011). The concept of behavioral engagement is often described in terms of effort or motivation. Much of what happens in classrooms can be reduced to the extent to which students comply with teachers' requests.For students to display behavioral engagement, they actively participate in the activities that the teacher provides. As students' relatedness to their teacher increases, so too does their enthusiasm and effort (Furrer& Skinner, 2003; Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villarreal, & Johnson, 2012). The goal of aninformal mentoring relationship is to alter the behavior of the student. The actions of the student will change once an emotional bond is formed and the student knows there is someone who genuinely cares about their success.

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement is the way that students think and is measured by their level of academic achievement. Cognitive engagement is also directly affected by having positive relationships with teachers and is often a result of the student being behaviorally engaged by putting forth effort related to academic tasks. Research indicates that when students perceive that their teachers care about them, they have higher levels of achievement (Muller, 2001). In one study, students' grade point averages rose significantly as their personal relationships with their teachers also rose (Fan, 2012). However, a student with a history of poor achievement may not experience academic success immediately, making the quality of the relationship more important as the teacher will have to continually promote effort until results occur. When academic achievement does not follow student effort, the support from the teacher becomes even more important in supporting resilience and encouraging the student to keep trying until success is achieved (Lessard et al., 2009).

Table 4. Student Engagement.

Engagement	Result	Source
Emotional	▪ Positive feelings about teacher ▪ Positive feelings about school ▪ Improved relationships with peers ▪ Improved relationships with family ▪ Improved perception of well-being	Baker, 1999; Huan, Quek, Yeo, Ang, & Chong, 2012.
Behavioral	▪ Decrease in classroom disruptions ▪ Decrease in office referrals ▪ Decrease in risky behavior ▪ Increase in compliant behavior ▪ Increase in effort on academic tasks ▪ Increase in motivation ▪ Increase in enthusiasm ▪ Increase in school attendance	Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes, &Schutz, 2012; Gregory &Ripski, 2008; Marsh, 2012; Rudasill, Reio, Stipanovic, & Taylor, 2010; Furrer& Skinner, 2003; Roorda, Koomen, Spilit,&Oort, 2011.
Cognitive	▪ Increase in academic achievement ▪ Increase in academic skills	Roorda, Koomen, Spilit,&Oort, 2011; Muller, 2001; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010; Murray &Malmgren, 2004; Fan, 2012.

Conclusion

Teachers have the ability to establish informal mentoring relationships with students who are at-risk and increase their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. The concept of mentoring is not new, but the ability of teachers to serve as informal mentors to students is often overlooked in pursuit of attaining academic goals through a reliance on curriculum and instructional techniques. Students who are at-risk have a unique set of needs due to a lack of attachment to a caring adult and emotional problems, and they may only be able to achieve academically after these issues have been addressed through an attachment relationship with a caring adult. The behavioral and academic shortcomings of students at-risk often result in poor relationships with their teachers. By exhibiting specific behaviors, teachers have the ability to reverse this trend and form meaningful emotional bonds with their most difficult students. A mentoring relationship with a teacher can result in the student experiencing positive feelings about school and the teacher, which in turn can lead to more effort and an increase in achievement. It should be the goal of any intervention program for students at-risk to increase their academic achievement. However, these increases in achievement will not occur unless the emotional needs of the student have first been met. A teacher who serves as a trusted guide to a student has the ability to form an emotional connection that can ultimately lead to their success.

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