YOUTH MENTORING AND ADULT-YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS: 
THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

__________________________________________

Miriam Brooker
ABSTRACT

This study is about programmes that foster adult-youth relationships and more specifically about the community context necessary for such programmes to flourish. The study is designed to explore a faith-based community context in which a youth mentoring programme is being considered as a strategy to help develop adult-youth relationships and youth participation in the community. The focus of this research is an Anglican parish in Perth, Western Australia. The study evaluates whether mentoring would be the most appropriate adult-youth programme intervention to facilitate parish ministry to its young people.

Three literatures related to formal adult-youth programmes including youth mentoring, intergenerational and youth-adult partnerships inform the study. Key programme characteristics and theoretical models related to the three literatures are identified, as well as recommended practices or behaviours associated with the development of effective adult-youth relationships.

The study methodology emphasises wide consultation and elicits the perceptions and expectations of participants regarding youth mentoring and youth participation. Illuminative evaluation, action research and mixed methods approaches are integrated and combined within the study, incorporating a range of data sources to be compared and contrasted to identify adult and youth needs and to produce recommendations pertinent to the parish context. A sociocultural approach to data analysis and interpretation, as outlined by Barbara Rogoff, is employed to foreground interpersonal relationships in the parish whilst also considering individual and cultural-institutional planes of analysis.
Youth participation is identified to be an adult need given the anxiety of many study participants about the future of the parish and their valuing of a community incorporating all age groups. Despite generally positive participant expectations of mentoring as an intervention, study findings indicate that a formal youth-adult activity programme would be more likely to respond to the needs of all young people connected to the parish. Mentoring is identified to be one potential form of youth-adult activity that could be included, as well as being a form of relationship that could develop naturally. The study includes four main recommendations regarding preparatory activities intended to support the design and implementation of an effective parish adult-youth programme: (1) Address barriers to communication between youth and adults; (2) Be aware of power differences between adults and youth; (3) Be open to supporting youth-initiated change; and (4) Develop a shared vision for youth participation in the parish. Overall, lessons learned from the youth mentoring, intergenerational and adult-youth partnership literatures suggest that a focus on mutuality and reciprocity between youth and adults is most beneficial for the development of ongoing relationships.
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