



What do Programs Do To Foster Connectedness?

by

Jean Baldwin Grossman



Outline of talk

- n What is the prevalence or character of connectedness in youth programs?
- n What types of staff interactions enhance connectedness with youth?
- n What do programs do to enhance connectedness?
- n Why is connectedness important for youth programs?



Authors of Key Sources

- n Amy Arbretton
- n Jean Grossman
- n Carla Herrera
- n Laurie Kotloff
- n Wendy McClanahan
- n Milbrey McLaughlin
- n Karen Walker



Information drawn from research on connectedness in:

- n One-on-one settings [community-based mentoring, school-based mentoring, tutoring, apprenticeships]
- n Small group settings [group mentoring, small group activities]
- n Youth programs [Boys and Girls Clubs, Ys, youth community centers]



Type of organizations

- n Community-based mentoring like Big Brothers Big Sisters
- n School-based mentoring programs
- n Tutoring programs
- n Group mentoring programs
- n Work-based programs
- n San Francisco Beacons
- n Philadelphia Beacons
- n A variety of school-based after-school programs
- n Community-based after-school programs (Ys, B+GCs, Girls Inc)
- n Youth Places (a program for older high risk youth in Pittsburg)
- n Boys and Girls Club Targeted Outreach Project (for gang-related youth)



Summary of Mentoring Sample

- n 125 programs
- n >150 staff interviews
- n >200 mentors interviews
- n >200 youth interviews
- n 30 focus groups with volunteers, youth, staff and parents
- n >1000 youth surveys
- n 1500 volunteer surveys
- n 600 in-depth interviews with youth and mentoring representing 230 matches



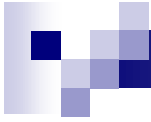
Summary of Youth Program Sample

- n Visits to:
 - ✧ 36 untargeted youth programs (Ys, Clubs, after-school programs, etc.)
 - ✧ 22 programs targeted specifically at older, high-risk youth
- n 2022 youth surveys
- n 179 staff surveys
- n 192 activity observations
- n 16 in-depth staff interviews
- n 18 in-depth youth interviews
- n 250 youth participated in focus groups

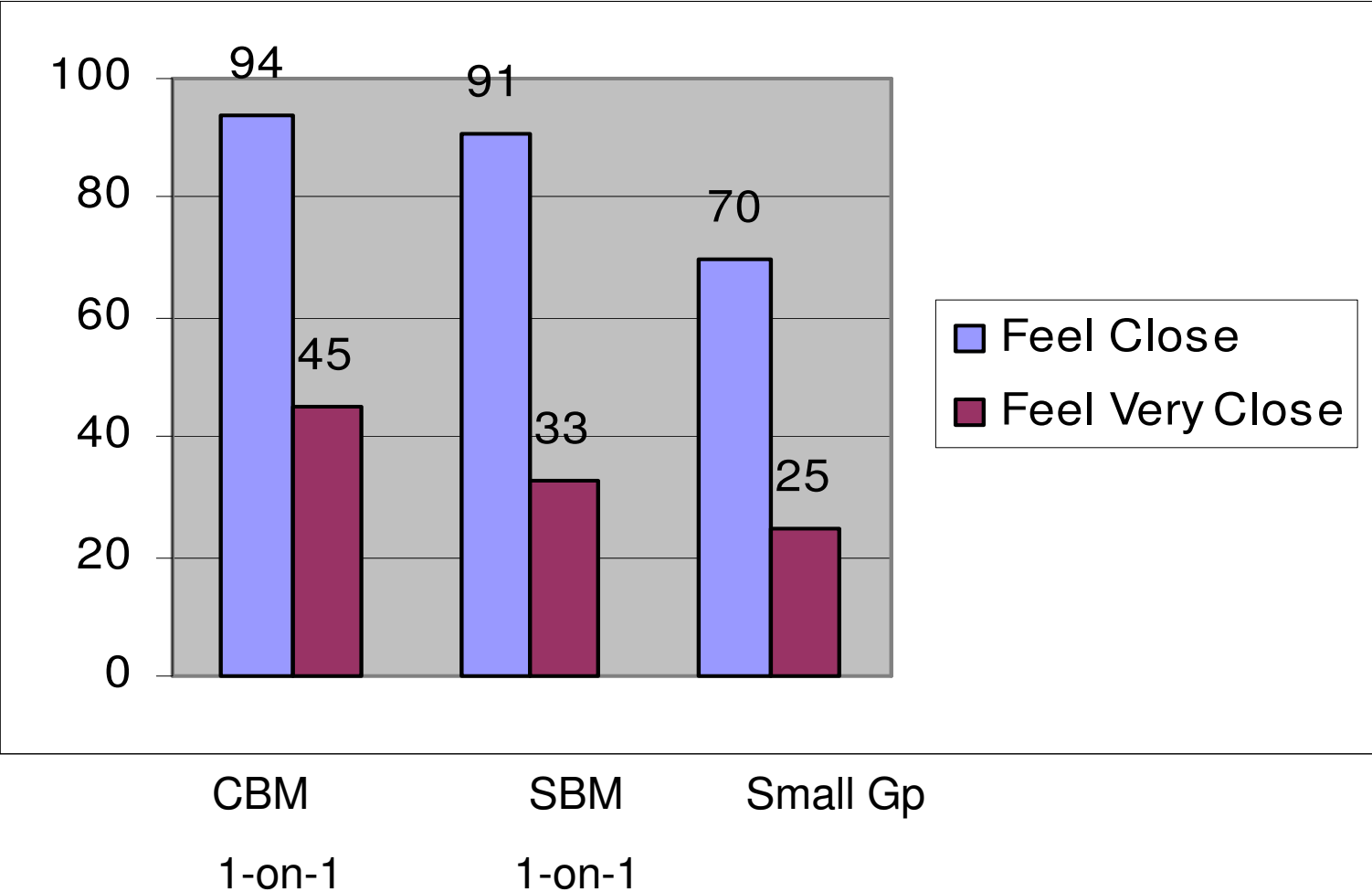



Degree of Connectedness in Youth Programs

- n In one-to-one programs 90-95% of youth felt “close” or “very close” to the adult
- n In small group [mentoring] programs 88% felt “close”
- n In “regular” youth programs between $\sim 2/3$ and $\sim 1/2$ of youth say they have an adult at the program they could go to for support—but relationship intentionality can dramatically increase this



CLOSENESS BY PROGRAM TYPE





Levels of Awareness of Connectedness

- n Some programs give no thought to it
- n Some programs recognize the importance of connectedness with staff
- n Some programs also recognize the importance of connectedness with the place



STAFF LEVEL FACTORS THAT PROMOTE CONNECTEDNESS:

- n Individual interactional factors

- n Group interactional factors



Individual interactional factors

- n Engaging in social or informal activities
[1st most important factor] [p<.001]
- n In a group setting, have one-on one interactions
- n Respecting the youth
- n Giving youth opportunities for decision-making and eliciting youth input [p<.01]



Adults show and earn youth's respect by:

Expressing care for youth

Being open and honest about themselves

Listening to the youth's ideas collegially

Being experts in their field

Engaging in activities with youth and being enthusiastic

Having similar interest to the youth

- Understanding and expressing interest in teen culture

- Having other similar interests



Teen Voices

“They are supportive. If you need anything they’ll help you—they listen. They have fun with the activity.”

“They ask how your day is.”

“She can act like she’s a teenager and she also has that mature side. We get to talk and play and stuff like that... about silly stuff, but always after youth council.”



Group Interactional Factors

- n Shape activities with the youth's interests in mind
- n Giving youth opportunities for decision-making and eliciting youth input [$p < .01$]
- n Cooperative Peer Environment—group activities, youth-to-youth help
- n Good “classroom” management
- n Adults actively engaging all youth



Ways Adults Integrate Youth Input

- n Youth are given support to select and design main projects
- n Youth choose from a menu of options within an activity
- n Youth select order of daily tasks
- n Youth use creative expression to carry out task
- n Staff integrate spontaneous youth input into daily activities (to a limited extent)



Youth Input

Effective instructors guide youth input to make it successful.

Younger teens need more guidance to make their input successful.

Youth feel they have input when staff listen to their ideas.

Quantitative finding: When youth have input, they have greater interest in activities [p=.01] and are more engaged [p=.02].



Instructors facilitate cooperative peer environment through:

Team-based tasks and activities

Engaging peer pairs

Engaging peer mentorships

Promoting “healthy competition”

Intervening when needed



Strategies for Fostering Friendly Peer Community

Staff establish ground rules about respect

Staff themselves value each group member (role modeling)

Staff set tone for informal socializing

Staff welcome new teens to the group



Cooperative Peer Environment

Quantitative finding: When instructors encourage peer cooperation

Teen interest levels are higher [p=.02]

Teens make greater efforts to attend
[p<.0001]

- ∨ Activity quality is significantly diminished by negative peer interactions



Practicing good classroom management

Staff correct youth and don't hold grudges

Staff are consistent

Staff don't play favorites

Staff ignore smaller infractions (especially important for riskier youth)

Staff use creative behavior management techniques



Programmatic factors that promote relationships:

- n Staff Factors
- n Activity Factors
- n Center/Program Factors




Staff Factors

- n Hire staff with similar interest as youth –2nd most important factor in 1-to-1 closeness
- n But staff do not necessarily have to be of the same race and ethnicity groups
- n Training and Guidance
 - Orientation and training (6+ hrs)
 - Supervision (once a month) and
 - On-going training (especially in school-based programs)
- n Staff continuity
 - Hours (FT vs. PT)
 - Retention (pay and hours)



Activity Structure

- n Activity size
- n Adult-Youth ratio
- n Session Length—short sessions inhibit relationship development
- n Fluid groups may inhibit connectedness



n Larger groups [even with many adults] reduce the degree to which youth feel connected

[$\beta_{\text{warmth}} = -.03, p < .01$]

n Higher staff-youth ratio seem to increase adult-youth relationships but the jury is still out. Peer interaction and leadership is lowered usually.

[$\beta_{\text{warmth}} = .17, \text{ns}; \beta_{\text{peer coop}} = -.26, p < .01;$

$\beta_{\text{leadership}} = -.88, p < .10$]

n It takes time to develop an attachment, thus shorter session and shorter participation (due to group fluidity) decrease connectedness



Dosage Factors

- n Frequency of contact does not seem to matter
- n Duration of contact—more is better
[$p > .001$]
 - α 4-6 months may be an important threshold



CENTER/PROGRAM FACTORS

- n Unstructured time for informal interactions—free periods, adequate time between activities
- n A culture of making time to socialize with youth
- n Space—snack rooms or lounges, drop-in room, office made available for private conversations, office space



Positive Staff-Youth Connectedness

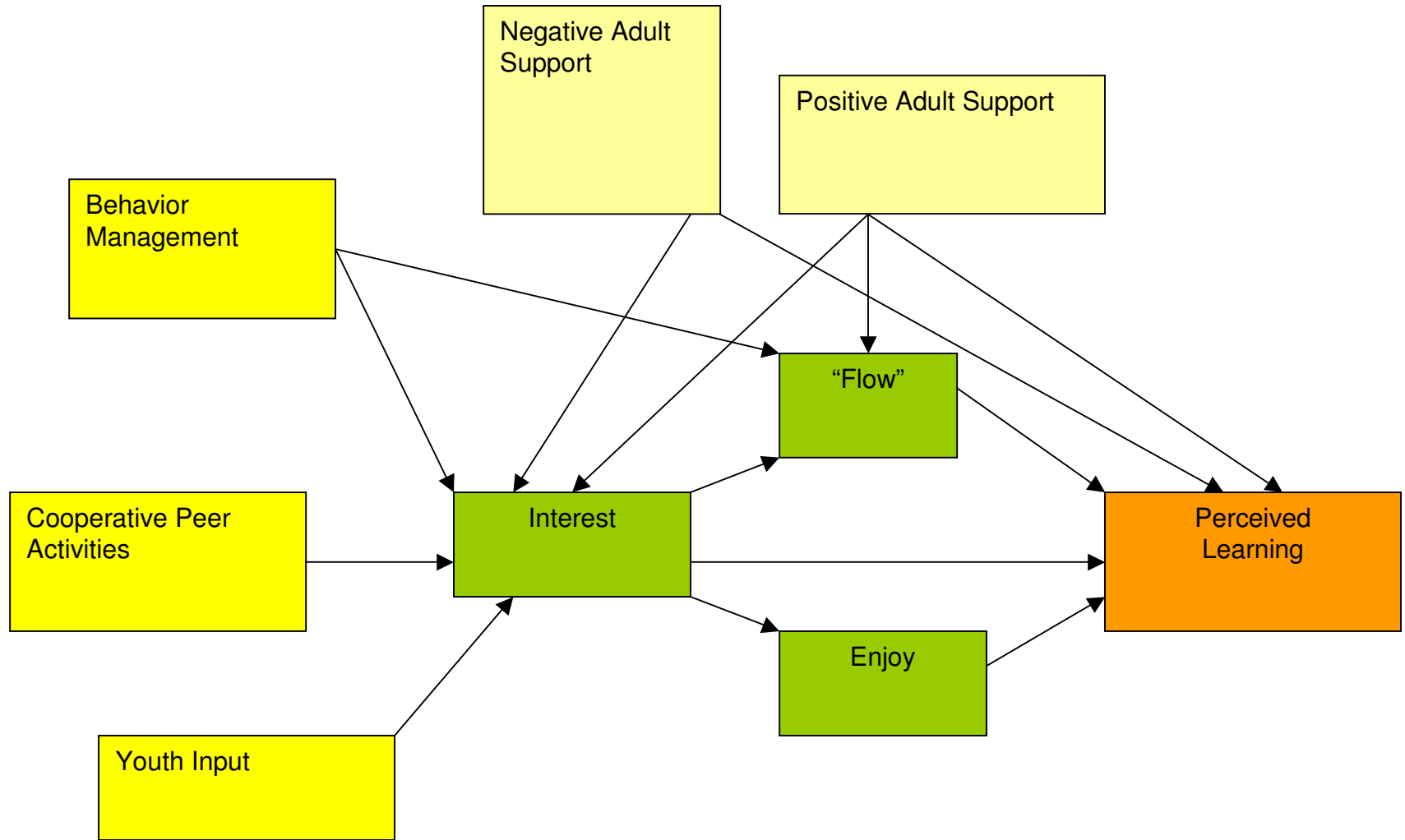
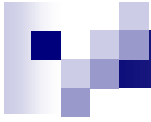
**Quantitative finding: Youth who have a
positive relationship with staff**

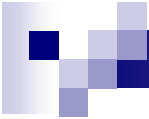
**Feel more positive about their activities
[$p < .0001$]**

Are more interested [$p < .0001$]

Are more engaged [$p < .01$]

Feel they learn more [$p < .0001$]





Strategies to Promote Connectedness to Place

- n **Have dedicate space for youth**

 - Beacon office space is open to youth

- n **Time is allotted for youth socializing**

- n **All staff make time for informal conversations with youth**

- n **Policies recognize youth as young adults**

 - Youth are given greater responsibilities & privileges

 - Beacons design opportunities for youth to lead, serve & grow



Youth-Friendly Beacon Environment

Quantitative Finding

Youth with a sense of belonging participate more intensively and for longer periods of time



Summary

- n Informal socializing interactions
- n Youth input
- n Cooperative peer environment
- n Good management techniques

Facilitated by:

- n Stable staff with similar interest
- n Space and time in which with to interact informally