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The mentoring FAN: a conceptual model of attunement for youth development settings

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ABSTRACT

Although youth mentoring as a field has enjoyed significant growth over the last 20 years, a good percentage of mentor relationships end prematurely. Empirically informed models of training to support the mentoring relationship are limited. The purpose of this article is to introduce the concept of attunement in youth mentoring; describe the FAN framework for relationship-building and reflective practice in youth mentoring and apply the model to work within a mentoring agency serving youth through site-based programmes. The proposed framework prioritises reflective practice and theories of interpersonal communication to help build relational connection within the youth mentoring system. The article concludes with recommendations for more general application of the FAN to social work practice beyond youth mentoring, and its potential role in promoting social worker well-being.

KEYWORDS

Attunement; mentoring; reflective practice; youth development

Introduction

Youth mentoring serves approximately 4.5million youth in nearly 6,000 programmes throughout the United States (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). Mentoring programmes are typically offered to youth with myriad risk factors, ranging from living in poverty, to single-parent households, to parental incarceration (Herrera et al., 2013). Such programmes match a non-parental adult volunteer to the youth in what is referred to as a ‘mentoring match’. Programmes typically employ mentoring staff responsible for supporting the mentor/youth match through in-person and/or virtual or phone-based efforts.

Although mentoring remains a widely known intervention, not all mentoring programmes and matches are equally effective. Nearly half of mentoring relationships close prematurely, often because they lack a strong connection (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Research supports the importance of close connections across the system of mentoring relationships, between mentoring staff, mentor, youth, and parent(s), to facilitate positive outcomes (Keller, 2005). To date, however, rigorous methods of training on relationship-building for the staff who support mentors, and for mentors themselves, are limited (Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2014).

This paper presents a model, the Mentoring FAN (Facilitating Attuned Interactions), used to build relational capacities among staff and mentors in their efforts to build

relationships with youth. The concept of attunement in mentoring relationships emerged from the work of Pryce (2012) and is defined as 'the capacity to respond flexibly to verbal and nonverbal cues by taking into account others' needs and desires' (p. 292). Mentoring relationships led by more attuned mentors (i.e., highest attuned were labelled as 'sage' or 'counselor'; Keller & Pryce, 2012) were associated with positive behaviour changes for the youth and higher relationship quality. Yet, to date, training on attunement in relationships with an articulated theory of change and accompanying 'micro-level skills' (Karcher & Hansen, 2014, p. 65) that underlie this approach is lacking. In this paper, we describe the need for training on relationship building, offer the FAN framework as applied to mentoring and youth development, and illustrate via a case study (Stake, 1995) the application in a mentoring agency.

Overview of research

Models applied to youth mentoring

Rhodes (2002) comprehensive model of youth mentoring considers the influence of mentoring across social emotional, cognitive, and identity development. This model was the first to employ a framework for understanding how the mentoring process works, and what specifically leads to positive outcomes from such relationships. The model emphasises mutuality, empathy, and trust in building a positive and connected relationship that facilitates growth and positive behaviours among mentees.

Frameworks focusing on relationship process have also been used to explore the connection between relationship quality and positive outcomes. Zilberstein and Spencer (2017) provided basic psychoeducation about the importance of attachment and the need for mentors to communicate clearly the reasons for mentoring relationships ending when the time came. Results indicated that when mentors devoted space for mentees to process feelings throughout the relationship process, youth were less likely to exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression at follow-up. Furthermore, providing youth with positive endings not only offered closure but also provided opportunities for youth to repair and work through past negative relational experiences through the mentor-mentee bond.

The psychotherapeutic literature can also contribute to the understanding of the relationship process within mentoring. Psychotherapeutic relationships are thought to be determined by three sets of factors, including therapist and client factors, and the contexts surrounding and supporting the relationship (Duncan et al., 2010). Similar to therapeutic relationships, in which the alliance between social worker and client is central to outcomes, mentor capacity is critical when considering mentor-mentee relationship quality (Spencer, 2012) and mentee outcomes. In contrast to therapeutic relationships, however, mentor-mentee relationships are organised through a set of shared activities and variable time spent, time often characterised by enjoyment and learning (Spencer, 2012). Additionally, volunteer mentors are not bound by a professional mandate to remain in the relationship, which can contribute to the premature terminations of mentoring relationships (DeWit et al., 2016).

The systems model expands the mentoring framework from a dyadic model (i.e., mentor-child) to a systems approach (Keller, 2015). In the systemic model, the youth

serves as the centre, while the mentor, mentoring staff member, and parent(s) interact in dyadic patterns with the child and one another within the perimeters of the programme (Keller, 2005). Any of the four individuals involved may end the match, which highlights the importance of each in the relationship system (Keller, 2005). The role and skills of mentoring staff, therefore, are critical to this system. Mentoring staff monitor relationships to promote agency goals offers guidance in conflict and serves as support for both families and mentors (DuBois et al., 2011; Keller, 2005; Keller & Pryce, 2010). Agency support, including adequate screening and ongoing training and resources (McQuillin et al., 2015), can facilitate mentoring by minimising risk within the relationship, which can support greater satisfaction for mentors and mentees (Mentor/mentee training and relationship support resources, 2009). Research indicates that positive assessment by mentors of their relationship with a staff member was associated with mentor/mentee relationship success (Keller, 2015).

Across mentoring models, staff are required to balance multiple duties, including supporting the mentors, while ensuring the programme goals of the youth agency (Larson, 2006). Mentors require attuned support as they venture into uncertain roles that often involve balancing status as an adult with the friendship that can characterise mentoring (Allen & Eby, 2007; Keller & Pryce, 2012, 2010). Despite the clear importance of staff skills, research as such, linked to a relational model, is limited (Keller & Blakeslee, 2014). The Mentoring FAN addresses this gap in staff training by offering a relational approach.

Training within the youth mentoring system

Given how vulnerable these relationships are to failure, supporting members of the system through training is critical. Reasons for relationship failure range from mentor or mentee abandonment to perceived lack of mentee motivation to deficiencies in mentor relational skills, including the inability to bridge cultural divides and inadequate agency support (Spencer, 2007). Cumulative youth risk, including family background characteristics, as well as youth age at match, are also predictive of premature match closure (Kupersmidt et al., 2017). This same research supports the presence of training and strong programme practices in supporting match longevity (Kupersmidt et al., 2017).

The focus of this paper is on Mentoring FAN training as applied to staff–mentor relationships. Given the impact of relationships *on* relationships, that is, parallel process within the mentoring system (Keller, 2005), it follows that strengthened staff–mentor relationships can improve the quality of mentor–youth relationships within the system. This paper explains the Mentoring FAN model conceptually, drawing on examples from the training of mentoring staff as well as published data to illustrate key points. All data shared here was reviewed by the university Institutional Review Board.

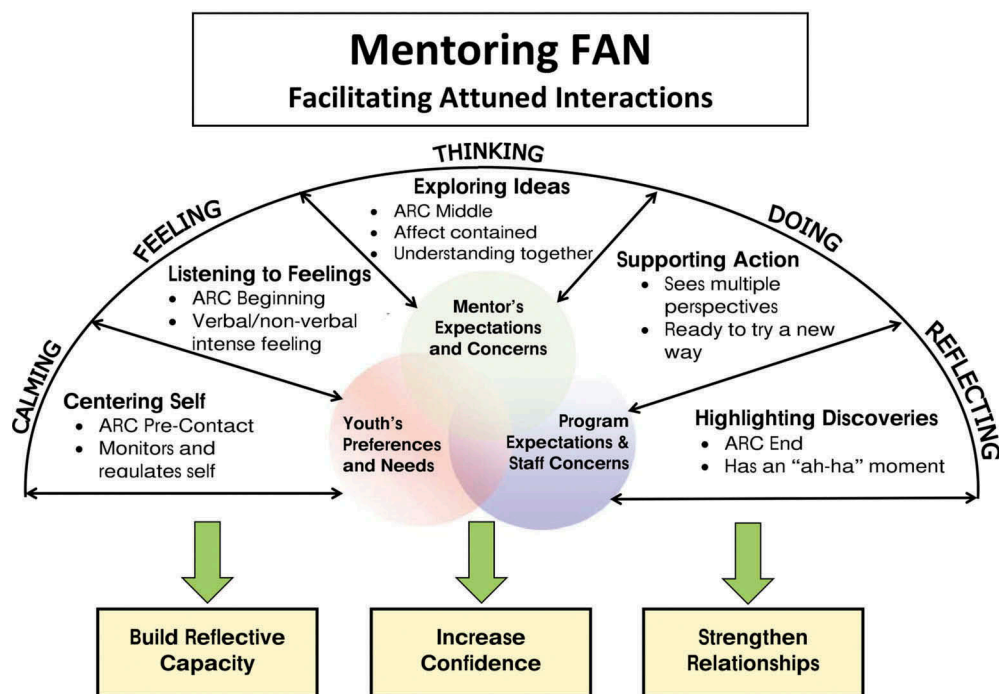
Research on FAN across helping settings

The FAN is a meta-framework generalisable to communication and engagement across relationships and systems. It is used widely in training home visitors, physicians, child welfare workers, and early intervention and mental health professionals. Recent evaluations of the FAN across these settings reveal promising results of increased empathy,

collaboration, and role satisfaction (Spielberger et al., 2016; Gilkerson et al., 2017; Cosgrove et al., 2019). FAN-trained home visitors also showed significant increases in reflective capacity and a reduction in burnout (Spielberger et al., 2017). FAN-trained juvenile court judges report increased self-regulation and reduced conflict in the courtroom (Cole-Mossman et al., 2018). Research on the Mentoring FAN shows similar positive impacts on empathy, collaboration and role satisfaction for mentor-support staff (Pryce et al., 2018). Staff and mentors report stronger relationships and in many cases, stronger mentor–youth relationships and/or increased clarity regarding match needs (Pryce et al., 2018).

Principles and practices of mentoring FAN

As an adaptation of the original FAN, the Mentoring FAN (Insert Figure 1) offers not only a mental model and a practical communication tool that operationalises the attunement process. More broadly, the FAN offers a new way to use the self in relationships with increased self-awareness and consciousness of the impact of relationships on relationships (M.C. Heffron et al., 2005). The theoretical basis for the FAN is embedded in the theories of infant mental health, a field founded on psychodynamic principles (Fraiberg et al., 1975). The FAN is also influenced by Winnicott's (1960) holding environment; that is, the safety needed in relationships for growth to occur and Fonagy's concept of reflective functioning; that is, the ability to reflect on the mental



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Figure 1. The mentoring FAN.

states of self and of others' (Fonagy et al., 1991). The empathic quality of the helping relationship – a hallmark of social work practice – is also a critical element in the FAN approach. Below we describe five principles underlie the FAN: attunement, self-efficacy, self-awareness, parallel process, and reflective practice and explain about how they lay the foundation for learning new relational capacities.

Attunement

Grounded in the literature on the moment-to-moment attunement in the parent/child relationship (D. Stern, 1985) and its extension to the client/clinician relationship (D. N. Stern, 2004), the original FAN was developed to facilitate attunement in parent/infant relationships (Gilkerson et al., 2012). Attunement, the organising construct for the FAN approach, refers to the experience of feeling connected and understood, which opens up space for trying new ways of relating (Siegel & Hartzell, 2013).

Attunement is a form of 'being with', described by Stern as 'to share in another's experiences with no attempt to change what the person is doing or believing' (1985, p. 148). Thus, one important guideline is to offer support from an empathic stance, trying first to see the world from the other's perspective. Being heard and understood by mentoring staff may create a greater openness in the mentor to honestly share their experiences with mentoring. More open sharing can translate into feedback more directly related to the mentor's needs.

Attunement rests on the capacity of the support person to begin to understand some of the other's internal world. This involves the capacity to read affective and behavioural cues to understand internal states (e.g., needs and motivations) and to remain flexible to offer interactions that most fit with what the other person is available for in that moment. FAN identifies five areas for responsive communication: Calming, Feeling, Thinking, Doing, and Reflecting (See [Figure 1](#)). A unique part of FAN is the first process, Calming or 'Centering Self'. This process focuses on staff member's self-awareness by developing the ability to track, regulate and understand, and use her own reactions during the contact in order to stay present for the other. The four remaining areas require reading the mentor's cues and moving flexibly on the FAN as needed. These are Feelings, which is 'Listening to Feelings' with empathy; Thinking, which is 'Exploring Ideas' together to plan or problem solve; Doing, which is 'Supporting Action' by focusing on strengths, providing information or practicing strategies to engage the youth; Reflecting, which is 'Highlighting Discoveries' and new insights of the mentor. There is no requirement to use all the FAN processes in a mentoring support session or contact or that they be used in a certain order.

FAN training prepares mentoring staff to match the other (i.e., most often the mentor but sometimes a youth/mentee or the youth's caregiver) in the same wedge of the FAN in interaction, as well as identify mismatches and repair the connection as needed. For example (as drawn from trainings of staff on the Mentoring FAN), the mentor is upset (Feelings) that the youth did not show up for an outing they had planned together, and the staff member offers emotional support (Feelings). In contrast, a mismatch is when the mentor and staff person are in different places. For example, the mentor wants to think something through (Thinking), and the support person offers too many ideas too soon (Doing), to which the response may be: 'I already tried that and it didn't work.' Realising

the mismatch, the support person might offer a repair, such as: 'I think I went too fast to my ideas. I'd like to hear what you think'.

In the Feeling wedge, staff learn to listen empathically by holding, validating, exploring, or containing feelings. When feelings are contained and the mentor wants to think or problem solve (Thinking), the staff learn to use questions to draw out the mentor's experience and build on his/her ideas, rather than offering an immediate solution to fix the problem. Sample questions drawn from training materials include: What do you think is happening? What have you tried? What might be a first step? What would it be like to try this new way? Often, the contacts between mentoring staff and mentors are brief, characterised by quick exchanges of advice or tips. Asking questions draws out the mentor's experience, and relieves the staff from pressure for immediate answers.

When the mentor asks for or needs information, the support staff moves to the Doing wedge, offering information succinctly and exploring new information with the mentor. For example, a bit of information and a question might be: 'Youth often make up their mind in the first five minutes of a contact if you are there for them. Does that fit your experience with Juan?' In Doing, strengths are highlighted; opportunities to practice are offered. When the mentor has new insights, the staff member moves to the Reflecting wedge. As an example derived from training, a mentor had missed a lot of sessions and did not really understand the impact of his absences on the youth. One day, when the mentor was walking into the school, he saw the youth in the window watching for him and had an 'ah ha' realisation: 'He misses me'. When he shared this revelation, the staff member validated him and reflected back his new understanding: 'What an important insight. You matter to him and he matters to you'.

The FAN prepares mentoring staff to maintain a mindful presence. There are times, however, when the mentoring staff is thrown off balance (e.g., mentor is ill, violence in the neighbourhood, youth takes money from mentor). Dysregulation can also emerge from internal experience, such as hunger, self-judgement, or everyday stress. FAN training prepares mentoring staff to go to the Calming wedge, and identify their own cues for dysregulation, and practice self-regulation strategies. These skills in self-regulation are grounded in an understanding of how relationships affect relationships, and how staying calm and present allows the other person to access their own thoughts and feelings.

In the following quotation, as derived from an interview conducted with a mentoring staff following training, he illustrates the FAN attunement process through his improved ability to listen, read cues, and gauge readiness for interactions:

... I developed a real intentionality about observing their cues, and asking more probing questions depending on where they're at. I came to a place where I can really sort of *watch* them ... I guess I became a better listener in the process. Just thinking more about where they're at and what they're ready for before I begin to provide feedback ... provide guidance, provide suggestions, and *observe* ... before I jump into those things. (Pryce et al., 2018).

Attunement is viewed as a 'messy' process, with expected mismatches. Priority is placed on repairing interactional mismatches as an essential part of healthy relationships (Tronick & Gianino, 1986). Thus, attunement involves reading cues about what is not

working and shifting as needed. Within the FAN approach, mismatches are not seen as a mistake, but as part of the dynamic process of human relationship.

Self-efficacy

Building capacity and self-efficacy by supporting mentors and youth, rather than doing *for* them, is a central premise of the Mentoring FAN. The staff members' role shifts from expert to collaborator. Rather than rushing to fix or give advice, the support person pauses to use a series of reflective questions to draw out the mentor. The ultimate goal is for the person being supported to feel more capable. In so doing, that person may see a presenting challenge as more manageable, even if the circumstance or behaviour does not change.

In reflecting on their practice following Mentoring FAN training, this staff member demonstrates how the use of questions, rather than offering advice, results in increased investment in 'figuring out things *with* them', as opposed to *for* them:

I found myself asking a lot more questions than I usually do, and I think that really helped. And, I would often say to him, "okay, let's figure this out . . ." So I usually don't ask mentors how they feel, but I think that really helped . . . we get so caught up in our own picture of how things are that we forget there's another person involved when we're trying to figure out things with them.

Another staff member succinctly reflects:

. . . doing the FAN has allowed me to see them [the mentors] in a little bit of a different role. Before, they were *my* mentors and I would tell them what to do and they would just do it . . . and now it's like we're working together and making a difference together.

Not only does this staff member see the mentors differently; she offers the mentors the opportunity to see themselves differently and more able (Pryce et al., 2018).

Building capacity not only facilitates collaborative problem solving; it also has the potential to reduce the emotional burden of the staff person. As this trained staff person reflects:

I'm more at ease because I don't feel like I have to come up with a solution to the problem right away. I'm just reminding myself that he needs to talk and as they talk, they're going to figure out something more. And it's through processing it with me that they can maybe come up with solutions on their own.

In building their own efficacy, and in sharing the responsibility within the relationship, the majority of those trained on the Mentoring FAN report relief and renewal in their more collaborative work (Pryce et al., 2018).

Parallel process

The FAN draws on the concept of parallel process, which, while not entirely new to the mentoring field (e.g., McMillin, 2013), has not been widely explored in youth mentoring. In psychodynamic theory, parallel process originally referred to the enactment in the supervisor relationship of the unprocessed material in the patient/therapist relationship (Doehrmann, 1976). In infant mental health, parallel process has a related but somewhat

different meaning described by Pawl and St John (1998) as ‘doing unto others as you would have them do unto others’. In the Mentoring FAN, it is hoped that the empathy and careful work of attunement between staff and mentors can be experienced in the quality of the relationship between the mentor and youth. FAN training promotes parallel process by teaching about its importance and modelling attunement during training.

Self-awareness

The FAN pays equal attention to attunement to the self as to attunement to the other. Self-awareness has been traditionally viewed as part of clinical training; yet, increasingly, self-awareness is viewed as a professional competency across fields and roles (Dobie, 2007; Freshwater, 2002). In the FAN framework, self-awareness means noticing one’s internal experience in interactions and reflecting on one’s general tendencies in relationships. It also draws from Bion’s (1978) concept of containment of intense affect and French’s (2000) work on negative capability or the tendency to disperse rather than hold negative affect. As implemented in the Calming wedge, this includes reading one’s own signs of regulation and dysregulation, having available self-regulation strategies for regaining balance during moment-to-moment engagement, and then, holding and containing oneself in order to hold and contain another’s experience. Staff learn Mindful Self-Regulation strategies (Breathing, Grounding, Self-Talk, Imagery) and choose those most useful for them. For many staff, this self-awareness increases consciousness of one’s personal interaction style, particularly a tendency to talk and problem solve rather than to listen and hold. As shared in a qualitative interview following the training, a mentoring staff stated:

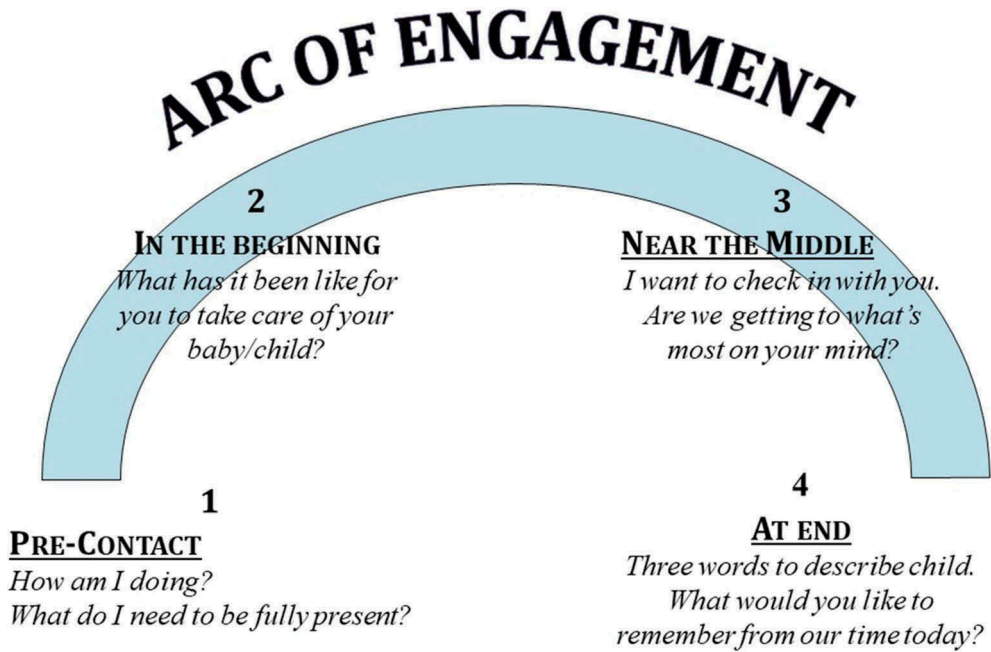
Now I’m much more conscious of what other people are thinking or feeling. Um, and allowing them to not only share their ideas, but implementing their ideas as effective as mine would be ... [the Mentoring FAN] allows me to take a step back and be empathetic that not everybody thinks or feels the way that I think.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice is a valued part of social work (Pawar & Anscombe, 2015) and is a practice competency in the social work education standards in the United States. In the mentoring world, reflective practice has also been conceived of as part of a reciprocal, critical process of co-learning through youth-adult partnerships (Zeldin et al., 2013).

Reflection involves slowing down and stepping back to consider the work from different perspectives, and intelligently adjusting one’s practice (Heller & Gilkerson, 2009). Reflection is best done within a trusting relationship where one can share the imperfect processes of the work and still be seen as competent. The mentoring staff/mentor relationship has been considered a safe, trusting relationship, and is the primary forum for learning the Mentoring FAN to date.

Schon (1983) defined reflection-on-action after engagement and reflection-for-action to prepare for engagement. The FAN serves as a framework for reflection and is used at each of Schön’s levels, as well as for reflection-in-action. The FAN process of reading



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Figure 2. The ARC of engagement.

cues, matching interactions, and repairing mismatches is reflection-in-action, or 'thinking on your feet'.

The Mentoring FAN uses reflection tools to guide after-action reflection during the training process. In the safety of their relationship, staff are supported to reflect on their experience by considering the question: 'What was it like for you to be with this mentor during this contact?' They are asked to think about contributing factors to moments of attunement and misattunement and consider how they might approach future interactions.

The Mentoring FAN also contains another element, called the 'ARC of Engagement', which facilitates a predictable structure for reflective sessions between the mentoring staff and the mentor (Insert [Figure 2](#)). The ARC has four reflective questions, the first promotes reflection for action. The dependable structure of the ARC gives the staff anchor points throughout the contact to ground themselves, and can build a connection with the other.

Application of mentoring FAN within youth mentoring agency

The Mentoring FAN fits best when a programme prioritises relationships, and when staff are open to learning a process-based approach. Implementation of the Mentoring FAN works well when a programme can commit to regularly scheduled, face-to-face (in person or video-based) contacts between staff and mentors. Mentoring FAN training

involves mentoring staff and, when possible, mentors. The foundational training is one day, followed by a period of four-five months of reflective practice. During practice, the learner completes reflection tools and reviews these monthly with their supervisors and/or the FAN trainer.

Mentoring FAN is illustrated in this case study in a literacy-based mentoring programme in a large urban setting on the East Coast of the United States. All staff, including direct and supervisory personnel ($n = 19$), participated in the training. Prior to training, staff members ($n = 16$) completed a survey focused on self-reflection, mindfulness, and attunement. Staff were invited to complete a follow-up survey at the conclusion of the practice phase; nine ($n = 9$) completed both surveys. Given the small sample size, this case study (Stake, 1995) is intended to provide a nuanced example of lessons learned in one setting and is not intended to provide insights that are statistically generalisable.

A subset of six trained staff and two administrators then participated in the practice phase (i.e., monthly calls and reflection review) over five months. Five of those participated in an interview (lasting 25–40 minutes) at the conclusion of their practice. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically. Quotations from interviews are included below and are identified using pseudonyms. This design was approved by the Institutional Review Board through both collaborating institutions. To mitigate researcher influence, surveys were submitted and collected electronically, and a third independent researcher participated in the data analysis phase.

Experience of mentoring FAN training

Participants responded positively to the initial training, rating on average 4.4 on a 5-point scale across evaluation domains (e.g., global rating training and specific sections such as ‘how helpful was training to their practice’). Examples of evaluative feedback include, ‘I *will* find the time for this! This will really make a difference!’ and ‘Materials provided were clear and engaging and eye-opening’. One staff described the training as ‘[an] organized researched method for improving relationships and effectiveness’. The training translated to concrete ideas for applying the Mentoring FAN daily. Examples include, ‘This is a good plan and one to use every day’. Another participant reflected on the training, stating ‘I really want to work on listening skills & fighting the urge to automatically fix a problem when it’s presented’.

Despite a small sample, responses indicated an improvement from pre to post in staff ability to reflect, and an increased level of insight regarding their work, as indicated by two subscales of the *Self-reflection and Insight Scale* (SRIS; Grant et al., 2002) ($t = -2.77$, $p = .024$; $t = -4.10$, $p = .003$, respectively). Staff also reported a positive trend in attunement (based on *Staff Attunement Scale* (SAS)) to the needs of mentors and youth, and to reading their cues. These findings need to be interpreted cautiously, given the small sample size and possibility of Type II error.

To obtain a more in-depth understanding of the influence of the Mentoring FAN on staff experience and skills, open-ended data (i.e., reflection forms, interview transcripts, group practice call transcripts) were also collected. During the practice phase, staff completed reflection forms tracking their experiences; 36 reflection forms were completed. Through analysis across these open-ended data sources, several core

themes emerged regarding staff gains and lessons learned, two of which are outlined here.

Attuned listening

Rather than always taking the lead during interactions with mentees, staff reported improved attunement in listening that resulted in a greater understanding of the other. As an example, Robin reflected on an interaction, saying, 'Karen appreciated being heard and that I took the time to listen to her'. Sustained listening allowed Tracy to understand the internal experience of her mentors: 'I finally heard what these people were saying'.

Through practice, staff contained their urges to act and learned to draw out and validate the reality of the other's experience. Jennifer stated, 'I focus more on letting mentors/mentees express feelings, and dial back on my pushy doing'. Another reported that she 'works harder at understanding the feelings behind behaviors'. As staff became more confident holding and exploring feelings, rather than minimising them and pushing forward, they saw the potential for a deeper connection. Robin reflected that the Mentoring FAN 'gave me a realization that my role can have greater impact'.

Primacy of relationship-building

The Mentoring FAN helped staff focus on building relationships, which necessarily requires more time. As an example, Carrie stated: 'I feel like we learned plenty. My only concern is having time to practice and implement. It's definitely an approach that requires time and patience'. Four months into the practice phase, Tracy reflects on the increased importance of such relationship building saying, 'I really need more face-to-face interaction with coordinators! It's something I've been thinking a lot about lately'.

According to participants in this case study, time required is well spent. Amber summarised it this way, 'Short term, it may be more work; long-term, it will make your job easier.' Carrie shared, 'You can get more in less time when using this tool.' Mary states, 'Using this tool has helped us see how much we need something like this to build the relationships we want in this program'.

Future directions and implications for social work

These are a few of many examples of the impact of the Mentoring FAN on staff approach to relationship-building. To date, mentoring FAN training has been applied primarily to staff (Pryce et al., 2018). Investment in mentoring staff is empirically supported and is associated with an increased sense of commitment from mentors to continuing their relationship, and indirectly contributes to relationship satisfaction (McQuillin et al., 2015).

The next step in the development of the Mentoring FAN is to train the volunteer mentors on this tool. In an exploration of the FAN impact, mentors supported by FAN-trained staff report feeling more support from staff, and an opportunity for improved interactions with mentees (Pryce et al., 2018). Preliminary efforts to examine the impact with mentors have demonstrated the promise and challenge in using this tool (Pryce et al., 2018). College students report a greater focus on affirming their mentees and validating their feelings without trying to change them. Mentors highlight the struggle to balance the

implementation of programme curriculum with a relationship focus. Research on the calculus between relationship-oriented and goal-oriented interactions suggest that while both kinds of interactions are important, collaborative interactions focused on relationship building are more strongly associated with relationship quality, particularly with younger mentees (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). These findings further emphasise the complexity of the mentoring role and the importance of training that helps to facilitate a relational connection in the midst of adherence to programme curricula.

Because FAN training enables a different use of self, it is transformative and builds relational capacities that go beyond the work and volunteer worlds. A judge trained in the FAN remarked, 'Six months ago, I would have been yelling from the bench ... I just listened and stayed calm. The FAN has made be a better judge ... really it's made me a better dad, a better person too'. Mentoring staff also shared how they were better listeners and more patient at home. Examination of the indirect effect of FAN training on other relationships, as well as explicit FAN training for interpersonal relationships, are planned next steps.

The FAN also has broader application to the needs of the social work field. The FAN operationalises the social work practice of meeting clients 'where they are', and builds skills in common factors that underlie effective interventions (Rosenzweig, 1936; Wompold, 2015). The FAN supports traditional social work values, including dignity and respect for the individual and self-determination, and offers a skill set for new social workers to realise these values in daily practice (NASW code of ethics, 2017). Social workers practice in stressful environments and experience higher levels of burnout than comparable professions (Lloyd et al., 2009). Use of the FAN reduced burnout for home visitors in social service agencies serving high-risk families (Spielberger et al., 2017) and provided a foundation for trauma-informed practice for social workers and others serving homeless families and families with substance use disorders (M. C. Heffron et al., 2016). These findings suggest the promise of the FAN for self-regulation and reflective practice, and potentially as a tool to reduce burnout for social workers and other helping professionals. The FAN is now used in social work education and shows promise as a reflective framework for new professionals learning social work practice and as a model for reflective supervision (Gilkerson et al., 2019).

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributors

Linda Gilkerson, Ph.D., LSW, is a professor at Erikson Institute where she directs the graduate training programmes in infancy and infant mental health. She founded Erikson's first clinical initiative, Fussy Baby Network, a national model home visiting programme for parents of infants

under one year. Dr. Gilkerson is the developer of the FAN (Facilitating Attuned Interactions), an approach that is used widely in home visitation, early intervention, early childhood mental health consultation programmes, and physician training to facilitate parent engagement and reflective practice. Her research and publications focus on relationship-based approaches and reflective supervision in a range of settings. She was a long-time board member of Zero to Three, lead or served on many early childhood task forces in Illinois and was recently awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Bright Promises Foundation for her work on behalf of young children.

Julia Pryce, Ph.D., LCSW, is a professor at Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work. Her research focuses on interventions of non-parental adults in the lives of young people living in risk. Her research and publications focus on mentoring and youth development in child welfare and in other systems, as well as the role of social justice and attention to spirituality in social work education. She is an Invited Member of the National Mentoring Research Board, and her work has received support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, among other funders.

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