

***Parents as Mentors for your own Children: Exploring STEAM Together
to Identify the Right Person-Career Fit for your Children***

For eight years my wife (Marilynne) and I did R&D on Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Projects carried out by 300 of my undergrads with more than 1,000 youth in grades 4-12. Most of these MAEPs focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics (STEAM), often in an interdisciplinary manner. When my undergrads wanted to carry out a MAEP with their own children, I encouraged this for many reasons.

Families have difficulty spending “quantity” time together when parents go off to work while their children go off to school. Parents and children seldom learn about each other’s abilities and gain respect for each other by working together in the family “business” as often occurred in years past. Youth seldom answer two very important questions: “What are my aptitudes, talents and career aspirations? What vocation matches my avocation?”

When parents implement a MAEP with their children, they spend “quality” time together while systematically sharing an expertise for 2-3 hours per week for 6-10 weeks. As Mentors, parents ensure their proteges learn *about* some aspect of STEAM that interests them, learn *why* this is important to know, and learn *how* STEAM concepts and skills solve real world problems. Involving other STEAM Professionals enables children to explore potential careers that match their aptitudes, talents and career aspirations, and then take courses to further develop this identified *person-career fit*. This is important so youth stay motivated to graduate, take the right courses, pursue the right academic major as undergrads, and enter a vocation that matches their avocation so they love the work they do each day. Employers also like this because the right person-career fit reduces costly employee turnover and improves work performance. Parents learn how to combine and employ best practices from Didactic Instruction and from Experiential/Discovery Learning.

You are probably wondering: why does a parent need to think and act like a Mentor while implementing a Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Project? As a **Mentor**, parents perceive their children more objectively as Proteges and thus interact differently with them as they share an expertise that interests the Proteges. **Assistance** from Mentors occurs in two main ways: equipping Proteges with specific knowledge, practical know-how and wisdom. And, empowering Proteges to use their talents and creativity, and to learn and do what interests them. **Enrichment** is provided directly by Mentors while doing scheduled activities with Proteges, and indirectly when Mentors arrange for other professionals to share expertise. All of this occurs during a carefully planned **Project** that has a beginning, middle and end as illustrated below.

Photography example: A parent wanted to share an expertise in photography with her daughter – taking black and white photos using film, developing the film, framing the pictures, and entering them in Fine Arts Shows where she won awards. To equip the Protege, this Mentor taught and demonstrated these competencies and helped the Protege prepare good interview questions to ask when they visited other photography labs and met photographers at two Shows. The Mentor empowered the Protege to apply this new knowledge to digital photography the Protege was already doing – to enhance photo-taking (angles, lighting, contrasts, etc.) and produce digital images requiring less digital editing. The result: the Protege learned how to do all aspects of B&W photography and used this to enhance digital photography. Mentor and Protege gained respect for each other’s expertise, and for one another.

Architecture example: Two boys had a beloved grandmother living in a Seniors Residence. Each time they visited, they heard many complaints. The mother knew her sons were interested in architecture as a potential career, so she offered to be their Mentor on this project: Design an Ideal Senior’s Residence that meets their needs. This Mentor taught her Proteges how to prepare questions and facilitate a focus group, took them to do this at the grandmother’s residence, helped them translate responses into a draft design, got a professional architect (friend) to enhance it, helped them build a scale model based on the revised design with input from the architect, took them to facilitate another focus group to get feedback on the scale model, helped them modify the design using this feedback, took them to present their final scale model for “The Ideal Senior’s Residence.” The Mentor personally equipped the Proteges with needed knowledge and skills, and also arranged for professional assistance. This was necessary to empower the Proteges’ interest in possibly becoming architects. The seniors were more than pleased with the scale model and the presentation explaining its design, because they had been listened to and their needs had been understood. The two boys, the mother and grandmother had spent quality time together. And, the architect (and two would-be architects) learned the value of listening to focus groups at the front end of this project (to solicit input) and at the back end (to get it right).

Dr. William A. Gray is a former Education professor at the University of British Columbia, where 300 of his undergraduates (future teachers) carried out Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Projects with more than 1,000 Youth in grades 4-12.

Email: wgray@mentoring-solutions.com