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research in action

Effectiveness of Mentoring Program Practices

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About the Research in Action Series

Overview

Last year, MENTOR released the *National Agenda for Action: How to Close America's Mentoring Gap*. Representing the collective wisdom of the mentoring field, the *Agenda* articulates five key strategies and action items necessary to move the field forward and truly close the mentoring gap. In an effort to address one of these critical strategies—elevating the role of research—MENTOR created the Research and Policy Council, an advisory group composed of the nation's leading mentoring researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

In September 2006, MENTOR convened the first meeting of the Research and Policy Council with the goal of increasing the connection and exchange of ideas among practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to strengthen the practice of youth mentoring. The *Research in Action* series is the first product to evolve from the work of the Council—taking current mentoring research and translating it into useful, user-friendly materials for mentoring practitioners.

With research articles written by leading scholars, the series includes ten issues on some of the most pressing topics facing the youth mentoring field:

Issue 1: Mentoring: A Key Resource for Promoting Positive Youth Development

Issue 2: Effectiveness of Mentoring Program Practices

Issue 3: Program Staff in Youth Mentoring Programs: Qualifications, Training, and Retention

Issue 4: Fostering Close and Effective Relationships in Youth Mentoring Programs

Issue 5: Why Youth Mentoring Relationships End

Issue 6: School-Based Mentoring

Issue 7: Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

Issue 8: Mentoring Across Generations: Engaging Age 50+ Adults as Mentors

Issue 9: Youth Mentoring: Do Race and Ethnicity Really Matter?

Issue 10: Mentoring: A Promising Intervention for Children of Prisoners

Using the Series

Each issue in the series is designed to make the scholarly research accessible to and relevant for practitioners and is composed of three sections:

1. **Research:** a peer-reviewed article, written by a leading researcher, summarizing the latest research available on the topic and its implications for the field;
2. **Action:** a tool, activity, template, or resource, created by MENTOR, with concrete suggestions on how practitioners can incorporate the research findings into mentoring programs; and
3. **Resources:** a list of additional resources on the topic for further research.

As you read the series, we invite you to study each section and consider what you can do to effectively link mentoring research with program practice. Please join us in thanking the executive editor, Dr. Jean Rhodes, and the author of this issue, Dr. David Dubois, for graciously contributing their time and expertise to this project.

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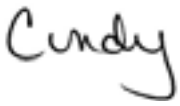

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RESEARCH

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Effectiveness of Mentoring Program Practices

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Introduction

At a fundamental level, the central objective of any youth mentoring program is to establish and support beneficial relationships between youth and their identified mentors. To be considered a *high-quality program*, a mentoring program arguably needs to accomplish this objective in ways that are not only effective (i.e., relationships are established that are high in quality and that yield positive impacts on youth outcomes), but also safe (i.e., no youth are inadvertently harmed), efficient (i.e., resources are used in a cost-effective manner), and sustainable/growth-oriented (i.e., the program is able to continue to operate over an extended period of time and serve increasing numbers of youth). This is no small feat, to be sure. Mentors and youth typically have not met previously, mentors are usually volunteers with no specialized prior training or experience, youth often come from highly challenged home and community environments and may exhibit significant personal vulnerabilities, and programs in most cases are operating under the constraints of limited resources. These considerations underscore the importance of determining what approaches, or *program practices*, are most successful in promoting effectiveness and overall program quality. Program practices include all processes that may be used systematically by an agency or organization to establish and support mentoring relationships for youth.

To date, research attempting to delineate beneficial program practices has been concentrated nearly entirely on the issue of effectiveness, as defined above (i.e., impacts on mentoring relationship quality and youth outcomes), rather than on other potential indicators of quality (e.g., safety or efficiency). For this reason, the present article focuses on mentoring program practices in relation to issues of effectiveness, while recognizing that their implications for program quality conceptualized more broadly is a key concern in need of greater investigation. For many reasons that will be explained, the task of identifying effective mentoring program practices is a more complex undertaking than might initially be expected. There is, however, evidence that effectiveness is far from uniform across mentoring programs. For example, in a meta-analysis that my colleagues and I conducted of 55 different evaluations of youth mentoring programs (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002), about 10 percent showed average effects in a negative direction (i.e., youth who received mentoring were worse off), one-third yielded effects that were close to zero (i.e., neither positive nor negative), and the remainder exhibited positive impacts that ranged in size from small to large. Findings further indicated that the typical youth received only modest benefits from participating in a mentoring program (average Cohen's d effect size of .18, which would be considered small).

These trends are suggestive of a *program effectiveness problem* in which there is wide variability in the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs and ample room for increases in their overall effectiveness as well.

Fields such as medicine, psychotherapy, and public health have increasingly embraced *evidence-based practice* as an approach for improving the quality of services and programs. Applied to youth mentoring, an evidence-based approach would involve using research to identify practices that reliably serve to enhance program effectiveness as well as any other identified dimensions of program quality. Alternative viewpoints might emphasize other strategies for addressing concerns about program effectiveness and quality. These include, for example, increased funding for programs to allow for better implementation of existing practices, program credentialing so that legitimacy and support are offered only to those programs judged to be high in quality, and reliance on practitioners or policymakers to identify best practices. Most likely, a combination of evidence-based and other approaches will be necessary to improve the level and consistency of mentoring program effectiveness. Indeed, it is clearly important that as evidence-based practices are delineated: they are supported through adequate funding; programs using these practices are reliably identified (as might occur through credentialing); and that the knowledge base continues to grow through testing of practices viewed as promising by those in applied roles.

The following sections of this article provide a brief overview of selected conceptual and methodological issues involved with identification of evidence-based mentoring program practices as well as a framework for summarizing and evaluating the evidence that pertains to the effectiveness of a given practice. Next, the status and major findings of existing research on the efficacy of mentoring program practice are summarized. A more in-depth examination of the evidence relevant to a specific practice—pre-match training of mentors—is also provided as an illustration of the process that might be involved with evaluating the evidence to support the effectiveness of a particular program practice.

Conceptual and Methodological Issues

The effects of any practice on mentoring program effectiveness will to some extent be dependent on or conditioned by a range of other factors. These include the other practices that are being implemented in the same program, the population of youth being served, the characteristics and backgrounds of the mentors, the experience levels and qualifications of program staff, program infrastructure and financial resources, and the broader community context within which the program operates. Illustratively, whereas training for mentors could be identified as generally beneficial, this might not be the case in a program that lacks adequate follow-up support once mentoring relationships are underway, or one in which staff are not well-equipped to offer effective training. Closely related to this concern is the possibility that a practice may need to be adapted

by host programs in order for its full value to be realized. Continuing with the example of training, even a curriculum with strong research support might require modification to fit the needs of a particular program based on such considerations as the program's goals, expectations and guidelines for mentors, and targeted population of youth. The question of how much latitude should be granted for users to make modifications to research-supported programs or practices remains controversial in the prevention field and is often referred to as the "local adaptation-fidelity debate" (Elliot & Mihalic, 2004). Although easy answers will not be at hand, efforts to identify evidence-based mentoring program practices always will need to grapple in a thoughtful manner with the question of which aspects of practices are essential and which can or should be modified and in what ways and under what conditions.

A final concern is that evidence-based practices once identified are likely to have practical utility only to the extent that clear guidelines are developed for assessing their presence or absence in a given mentoring program. Ideally, these guidelines would include benchmarks that allow for a determination of whether a practice can be considered present (cf. Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000). Aside from the issue of intentional modifications discussed above, this is an important consideration because of the reality that even earnest attempts at full implementation of a practice are likely to fall short of ideal levels. Consider, for example, with respect to mentor training that staff may fail to cover all intended content and that mentor attendance may be less than complete. The depth of research required to develop a fully operational set of benchmarks for evidence-based practices in youth mentoring is currently lacking, but clearly should be a priority as the field moves forward.

A Framework for Summarizing and Evaluating Research on Mentoring Program Practice Effectiveness

A framework for summarizing and evaluating research on the effectiveness of mentoring program practices is shown in Table 1. Hypothetical examples of research studies are included as well to illustrate the different types of evidence and findings that together comprise the major dimensions of the framework. In actual use, all the research that is summarized would pertain to a particular practice of interest; for present purposes, examples are provided that pertain to several different program practices.

A detailed and comprehensive discussion of the proposed framework is outside the scope of this article. It will be useful, however, to consider several of its overarching features and key assumptions. First, the framework distinguishes three general levels of evidence. Level 1 involves study designs that isolate the mentoring program practice of interest (e.g., all participants in a program are exposed to the same practices with the exception of the practice of interest which only some participants receive). This level represents the highest or most conclusive evidence of the impact of a practice on program effectiveness. Level 2 involves less precise comparisons in which the practice

of interest is not isolated (e.g., the practice is embedded in an overall program which is being compared to a no treatment control condition). This level represents a notably weaker form of evidence because any differences in outcomes could be attributable in whole or in part to other practices with which the practice of interest is bundled. Level 3 involves qualitative research. These types of studies can be highly informative in many ways. Nevertheless, because the design features, quantitative measurements, and statistical controls necessary to isolate the effects of a program or practice are typically not present (Shadish et al., 2002), qualitative research by itself generally does not constitute a reliable indicator of effectiveness in evidence-based practice models. Within each of the three general levels of evidence in the proposed framework, two sublevels are further identified (see Table 1). The first of these sublevels in all instances (e.g., 1a) represents the stronger of the two in terms of informing determinations of the effectiveness of a practice.

As described above, the framework focuses on study design features as a primary determinant of the strength of the evidence made available by any given investigation. It is assumed, however, that the full range of other methodological concerns also will be taken into account. These include issues relating to sample size and representativeness, reliability and validity of measures, and appropriateness of data analytic procedures and statistical inferences (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005).

Depending on the methodological rigor of a study when considered in this broader context, even an investigation with an ideal design could be considered to be seriously compromised and its findings thus accorded limited weight or influence. Conversely, a study with a relatively weak design (in the context of this framework) would merit greater weight if other aspects of its methodology are exemplary. These considerations notwithstanding, it is assumed that the degree to which a study's design is well suited to clarifying the contributions of a practice to program effectiveness is of fundamental importance and that deficiencies in this area cannot be fully overcome by other desirable aspects of study methodology. So, for example, a Level 2 study typically would not be regarded as providing strong evidence of a practice's impact given the inherent imprecision of a design that does not isolate the influence of the practice of interest from that of other practices. This precedence accorded to study design is consistent with other evidence-based frameworks (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse, n.d.).

A final important feature of the framework is that not only studies in the formal research literature, but also internal analyses of information by mentoring agencies and organizations (and other stakeholders, such as funders) are assumed to be potentially relevant to evaluating the effectiveness of a practice. Examples of the latter type of efforts appear in italics within the table. Their inclusion within the framework provides one avenue for addressing concerns discussed previously that host programs may have regarding the relevance of available evidence to their program and participants and the potential need for local adaptations. In instances in which outside research is lacking, agency- or

organization-generated research may also be the only source of information available. This often may be the case, for example, for novel practices that are not yet widely disseminated. More broadly, it seems valuable, too, for the field as a whole for mentoring programs and organizations to be actively engaged in generating data that can inform their program improvement efforts, rather than relying solely on outside sources.

In a typical application of the framework, the first step would be to identify research that is relevant to the mentoring program practice of interest. Next, each study would be categorized according to the level of evidence it represents. Its findings then would be summarized in that row of the framework, taking care to distinguish among positive findings (i.e., those that are supportive of the practice enhancing relationship or youth outcomes), null findings (i.e., those that fail to reveal any reliable differences in outcomes), and negative findings (i.e., those that indicate the practice may detract from effectiveness).

The final, and arguably most challenging, step would be to synthesize the available evidence and make a judgment regarding the practice's effectiveness. This process is likely to be complicated by inconsistency in findings both across and within studies. For example, some studies may find evidence that matching youth and mentors on the basis of race or ethnicity improves mentoring relationship quality, others may fail to find such an association, and still others may report mixed findings across different measures of quality such as length and emotional supportiveness. In other areas (e.g., public health), expert panels of researchers and other stakeholders (e.g., practitioners) have been convened to review the available evidence and arrive at joint decisions concerning the evidence base to support different practices. Typically, determinations are not "all or nothing" but rather make somewhat more fine-grained distinctions. The What Works Clearinghouse (n.d.) of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Science, for example, in assessing the strength of evidence for an intervention, provides a rating of positive effects, potentially positive effects, mixed effects, no discernible effects, or potentially negative effects. These ratings may be provided separately for different types of outcomes (e.g., academic and behavioral). Also included are an Improvement Index that gives a sense of the size of the intervention's effect and an Extent of Evidence rating that indicates how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating.

Research on Program Practices

Descriptive Studies

Before considering research that addresses the impact of different mentoring practices, it is worth noting the value of investigations with more descriptive aims. These studies may highlight important trends in program practices that merit further investigation. A national survey of 1,762 mentoring programs conducted by MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership (Manza, 2003), for example, revealed that site-based programs had nearly eclipsed more traditional community-based programs in popularity, thus underscoring

a need for research on site-based approaches. Descriptive studies also can provide information concerning the extent to which practices with evidence-based support are being adopted and in what ways they are being adapted by programs in the process. In the same survey referred to above, for example, nearly a quarter of the programs surveyed (24 percent) did not report providing pre-match orientation and training to mentors. Another survey of more than 700 mentoring programs (Sipe & Roder, 1999) found that among those programs that did require mentors to attend an orientation and complete some type of pre-match training, the total amount of time spent in these activities varied greatly (Sipe & Roder, 1999). In a field that is evolving and expanding rapidly, such as youth mentoring, there will always be a need for high-quality descriptive studies of current program practices.

Status and Major Findings of Research on the Effectiveness of Program Practices

Numerous mentoring programs have had their effectiveness for promoting youth outcomes examined in rigorous evaluation research. These studies are of relatively limited value, however, for informing understanding of the importance of particular program practices. This is because, as noted previously, the typical program evaluation is designed to estimate the cumulative effects that are produced by the multiple practices that comprise a given program rather than the unique contribution of any one practice (i.e., Level 2a and 2b in the evidence framework described above; see Table 1). There still may be substantial unplanned variation in exposure to a particular practice across participants in the evaluation of a mentoring program (DuBois et al., 2006). This type of variation may occur for a variety of reasons, including differences in implementation across both program sites (in the case of multi-site studies) and staff within sites. Analyses of the association between such differences and outcomes may be informative with regard to the practice's contributions to program quality (i.e., Level 1b evidence). Unfortunately, opportunities of this nature have not been exploited consistently in evaluations of mentoring programs.

The most extensive empirical examination of program practice effectiveness to date was carried out as a part of the meta-analysis referred to previously that my colleagues and I conducted (DuBois et al., 2002). In analyses that controlled for the methodological characteristics of studies, we found that seven different mentoring program practices were predictive of stronger positive effects on youth outcomes: procedures for systematic monitoring of program implementation, use of community settings (as contrasted with only the school setting) for mentoring, utilization of mentors with backgrounds in helping roles or professions, clearly established expectations for frequency of mentor-youth contact, ongoing (post-match) training for mentors, structured activities for mentors and youth, and support for parent involvement. The magnitude of estimated effects increased systematically as programs utilized a greater number of the practices, thus suggesting that they made independent contributions to youth outcomes. These findings offer a noteworthy level of evidence-based support for the practices involved (i.e., Level 1b in the evidence framework presented in this article). The program practices themselves, however, were only able to be coarsely defined in this research. It is therefore not clear what types of delivery formats, content, or levels of intensity may be required for

any of the practices involved to contribute positively to youth outcomes. The less than optimal level of specificity in how program practices were able to be assessed also underscores that it would be inappropriate to conclude that other practices not predicting differences in effectiveness in this research are necessarily unimportant (DuBois et al., 2002).

Pre-Match Training

In the meta-analysis, programs that provided pre-match training to mentors did not have significantly greater estimated effects on youth outcomes (DuBois et al., 2002). Several studies have also examined associations between naturally occurring variations in exposure to initial training within programs and indices of relationship quality (Furano, Roaf, Styles, & Branch, 1993; Herrera et al., 2000; Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007; as with the meta-analysis, the findings of these studies provide evidence at the 1b level in the proposed evidence framework). In a study of 669 mentors who were involved either in one-on-one community-based or school-based programs (Herrera et al., 2000), those mentors who indicated they had attended fewer than two hours of pre-match orientation or training reported the lowest levels of closeness and supportiveness in their relationships with their mentees, whereas those mentors reporting the strongest relationships had attended six or more hours of orientation or training prior to the match. These associations were evident for mentors in both types of programs. In the recent national impact study of Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring programs (Herrera et al., 2007), mentors who reported receiving more pre-match training reported higher levels of efficacy, or confidence, before being matched and were more likely to extend their relationship into a second school year. Those mentors who reported receiving more individual training pre-match also reported having closer relationships with their mentees. Not all findings in this study, however, supported the importance of pre-match training. Whether the mentor participated in training and the amount of group training received, for example, were not significantly associated with either the length or mentor-reported closeness of relationships that developed during the first year of program involvement. Youth reports of relationship closeness (as opposed to mentor reports), furthermore, were unrelated to any of the pre-match training measures. In another study examining training across eight agencies, Furano et al. (1993) found that indicators of relationship quality (average number of meetings, percentage of matches not meeting, matches not meeting because of loss of interest) did not differ significantly between four agencies that provided pre-match training (three hours, on average) and the remainder that did not.

In a further noteworthy study (Cavell & Hughes, 2000), 62 teacher-identified aggressive second- and third-grade children were assigned randomly to receive either "therapeutic" or "standard" mentoring. Mentors in the therapeutic condition received 18 hours of training to enhance their understanding of childhood aggression and their

capacity to develop and maintain an emotionally supportive relationship with an aggressive child; those in the standard condition received only a one-hour orientation, focusing on safe and appropriate mentoring activities. The two conditions were further distinguished by the mentors of children in the therapeutic condition receiving regular supervision and having a longer period of time to establish relationships with children (children in the standard condition were assigned new mentors each semester) and by children in this condition receiving problem-solving skills training and parent and teacher consultation. The study design thus did not isolate the practice of interest (pre-match training). It did, however, feature an experimental contrast involving this practice and a well-defined set of additional program elements (i.e., Level 2a evidence; see Table 1). Overall, findings failed to reveal any differential effects of the therapeutic mentoring condition on youth outcome measures (e.g., aggressive behavior). Children in the therapeutic mentoring condition did report viewing their mentors more positively than those receiving standard mentoring. There also was some evidence that the therapeutic mentoring condition was a better fit than standard mentoring for those children who had experienced parental rejection or who were viewed negatively by their peers (Cavell & Hughes, 2000).

Qualitative investigations also have reported findings that address the potential role of training. In one notable investigation (Spencer, 2006), in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 adolescent and adult pairs who had been in a continuous mentoring relationship for a minimum of one year and then were systematically analyzed (i.e., Level 3a evidence; see Table 1). Findings suggested that it could be beneficial to provide training for mentors that addresses cultural issues pertaining to class and race differences in a more intensive manner than has been the case typically in programs (Spencer, 2006). A review of primarily qualitative research on mentoring in after-school programs (Hirsch & Wong, 2005) similarly concluded that enhanced training for staff could help them to more fully realize their potential to provide effective mentoring to youth.

Overall, the available evidence regarding the effectiveness of pre-match training for mentors is mixed. In an actual application of the proposed framework, a panel of researchers and practitioners ideally would convene to consider this evidence and potential explanations for the variability in results. Along with the methodological quality of studies, it would be important to consider the quantity and delivery format of the training provided in each investigation as well as the content of training materials and their likely value in helping mentors build beneficial and enduring relationships with the youth being served by the program(s) involved. This process could yield collective informed judgments regarding the likely effectiveness of pre-match training, associated recommended benchmarks, and the strength of the available evidence. Decisions regarding the use or endorsement of this practice by a mentoring agency, organization, or other stakeholder (e.g., funder), in turn, could then be made with appropriate consideration given to other pertinent factors. These include the relative strength of evidence-based support for other program practices (e.g., post-match training) that might serve similar needs as well as the goals and resources of the mentoring programs involved and the practices they already have in place.

Conclusions

The framework presented in this article represents a first step toward developing a systematic approach for integrating and evaluating evidence regarding the effectiveness of different mentoring program practices. To date, the foundation of research that is required to make informed judgments using this framework is in an early stage of development. For purposes of illustration, this article reviewed the evidence base for pre-match training. Other practices that are widely regarded as core components of mentoring programs, such as volunteer screening, matching, and supervision, have received a similar degree of preliminary study and thus are also in need of more extensive investigation. Still other basic program functions, such as recruitment, have been largely ignored by researchers and will require even more dedicated investments. Newer modalities and structures for mentoring (e.g., group, site-based, peer, on-line), most of which have only just begun to be studied in earnest, clearly should receive more in-depth examination as well (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). These considerations underscore the importance of coupling application and ongoing refinement of the proposed framework with intensified efforts to strengthen the available evidence base. These complementary directions, if embraced by the field, hold significant promise for yielding insights and recommendations that substantially improve mentoring program effectiveness.

Table 1a: Framework for Characterizing the Evidence for Mentoring Program Practices

Evidence Level	Description	Examples[d]		
		Positive Finding	Null Finding	Negative Finding
1a: Experimental Test of Practice of Interest (POI)	Research comparing outcomes[a] with and without the practice of interest (POI) using an experimental design[bc].	A study randomly assigns mentors in a program to receive or not receive pre-match training and finds favorable effects of training on relationship quality and youth outcomes.	*An agency randomly assigns mentors to receive or not receive post-match training and finds no difference between groups in mentoring relationship quality or youth outcomes.*	A study randomly assigns programs to use or not use a new training protocol for mentors and finds a negative effect of the new training on mentoring relationship quality as rated by youth.
1b: Quasi-experimental Test of POI	Research comparing outcomes[a] with and without the POI using a quasi-experimental design (includes unplanned variations in exposure to POI within studies as well as comparisons across studies using meta-analysis)[b].	*An agency compares youth outcomes prior to and after instituting group "get acquainted" activities to facilitate volunteer-youth matching and finds improvements in youth outcomes.*	A study comparing mentors who did and did not receive the required number of support contacts from agency staff finds no difference in relationship closeness or duration between the two groups.	A meta-analysis finds that programs offering mutual support groups for mentors have higher percentages of relationships that terminate prematurely.
2a: Experimental Test of Program/ Set of Practices that Includes POI	Experimental research comparing outcomes[a] for a program (or collection of practices) that incorporates the POI and a no-treatment control condition or other condition that does not include POI[c].	A study randomly assigns youth to either a mentoring program that includes a curriculum of group activities to promote relationship development or to a no-treatment control group and finds positive effects of the program on both relationship quality and youth outcomes.	*A foundation randomly assigns programs to receive or not receive funding to support program enhancements and finds no difference between the two groups of programs in relationship quality or youth outcomes.*	A study assigns programs to use a collection of promising "enhanced" mentoring practices or to continue using standard practices and finds poorer relationship quality in programs using the newer practices.

Table 1b: Framework for Characterizing the Evidence for Mentoring Program Practices

Evidence Level	Description	Examples[d]		
		Positive Finding	Null Finding	Negative Finding
2b: Quasi-experimental Test of Program/Set of Practices that Includes POI	Quasi-experimental research comparing outcomes for programs (or collections of practices) that incorporate the POI (includes unplanned variations in exposure to the POI within studies as well as relevant comparisons across studies using meta-analysis).	A study compares youth who either did or did not participate in a school-based mentoring program that includes provisions to facilitate summer contact between mentors and youth and finds more favorable outcomes for youth participating in the program.	A study compares programs that do or do not conduct home visits as part of the screening process for prospective mentors and finds no difference between the two types of programs in relationship quality.	*An agency compares outcomes before and after adopting a new set of practices resulting from a strategic planning process and finds a decrease in relationship quality or youth outcomes.*
3a: Qualitative Investigation	Qualitative research of multiple programs or program participants in which data relevant to the POI are collected and analyzed (includes narrative literature reviews).	*A national mentoring organization conducts focus groups with mentoring program administrators and findings suggest that adoption of the organization's practice guidelines improves mentoring relationship quality.*	A literature review concludes that matching youth and mentors on race/ethnicity does not make a difference in relationship quality or youth outcomes.	Mentoring relationships that have terminated prematurely are investigated through interviews with youth and mentors and findings suggest that a lack of regular supervision contributes to relationships ending prematurely.
3b: Case Study	Case studies of individual programs (or individual participants or mentoring relationships in programs) in which data relevant to the POI are collected and analyzed.	A case study of a mentoring program suggests that matching youth and mentors on ethnic background may promote better youth outcomes.	A case study of an after-school program suggests that the practice of incorporating mentoring into the program's mission statement does not by itself contribute to the development of beneficial mentoring relationships between youth and staff.	*A staff case presentation of a youth participating in a mentoring program suggests that the practice of adopting goals focused exclusively on increasing the number of youth served may detract from the quality of the relationships being established in a program.*

[a]Outcomes in the context of this framework include indicators of both mentoring relationship quality and youth adjustment. [b]The design must be one in which the only practice that differs between conditions or groups is the POI. [c]Experimental designs involve random assignment to different conditions; alternative designs that provide a similarly strong basis for making determinations of causal influence (e.g., regression discontinuity) also are included in this level of evidence (see Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002, for a discussion of these types of designs). [d]All examples are hypothetical and thus do not reflect actual studies that have been conducted.

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Notes

ACTION

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Effectiveness of Mentoring Program Practices

Like many young disciplines, innovation in the practice of mentoring far outpaces available research on the effectiveness of mentoring. Mentoring programs are often forced to adapt to changing communities, youth populations, and volunteer motivations without the benefit of formal research. This often results in confusion about what works and why, and may lead to the perpetuation of ineffective practices. In his article, Dr. DuBois outlines a framework for evaluating mentoring program practices by delineating the various evidence levels required. Importantly, the framework not only includes formal research, but also incorporates internal analyses of information by mentoring programs and organizations. Most mentoring programs lack the resources to conduct formal research and find it difficult to decipher broader research findings into practical implications for their programs. This action section outlines a step-by-step process that agencies and organizations can use to design and conduct evaluations of specific practices within their programs.

How to Evaluate Program Practices

There are many types of program evaluation assessing everything from program processes to youth outcomes. The steps below describe how mentoring programs can evaluate the effectiveness of a specific practice.

Step 1: Identify a problem, challenge or opportunity your program is facing.

Example: A number of mentors have expressed concerns about their mentees' lack of enthusiasm for the program and unrealistic expectations for their relationships.

Step 2: Develop a hypothesis or prediction regarding a practice that addresses the problem.

Example: Mentees who receive training prior to being matched will be better prepared for mentoring, resulting in longer-lasting relationships.

Step 3: Determine what practice you need to asses to test your hypothesis.

Example: Mentee training

Step 4: Formulate the research question you want to answer.

Example: Will providing initial training for mentees increase match duration? (if no mentee training is currently provided) *Or, does providing ongoing training for mentees increase match duration* (if only initial mentee training is provided)?

Step 5: Design the evaluation.

a) Decide what your comparison group will be and keep in mind the varying levels of Dr. DuBois's framework.

Example 1 (Evidence Level 1a): The program randomly assigns mentees in the program to receive or not receive training and compares the average match duration of the two groups.

Example 2 (Evidence Level 1b): The program initiates training for all new mentees and compares average match duration one year after the trainings began to average match duration before the trainings began.

b) Decide how you will measure the outcome(s). Where will the information come from? How will it be collected?

Example: Use case management data to determine the duration of each match in both the control and training groups.

Step 6: Collect and analyze the data.

Example: Determine the average relationship duration for the control and training groups and compare.

Step 7: Use the results.

Example 1: The analysis shows that the relationships of mentees who received training lasted three months longer, on average, than those who did not. Make mentee training a standard part of the program.

Example 2: The analysis shows no difference in relationship duration between the group of mentees who received training and those who did not. Assuming the training was implemented as intended, go back to step 2 and develop another hypothesis.

Effectiveness of Mentoring Program Practices

Information Technology International (ITI). ITI provides professional, programmatic, and technical support to government and industry. *www.itiincorporated.com*

- Evaluating your Program: A Beginner's Self-Evaluation Workbook for Mentoring Programs.
  www.itiincorporated.com/_includes/pdf/SEW-Full.pdf

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. The leader in expanding the power of mentoring to millions of young Americans who want and need adult mentors. *www.mentoring.org*

- The Elements of Effective Practice™
  www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php
- How to Build a Successful Mentoring Program Using the Elements of Effective Practice™
  www.mentoring.org/eeptoolkit
- How to Select a Survey to Assess Your Adult-Youth Mentoring Program
  www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/evaluation/howtoselectasurvey.doc

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory - National Mentoring Center. National organization that provides training and technical assistance to youth mentoring programs. *www.nwrel.org/mentoring*

- Frequently Asked Questions About Research and Evaluation
  www.edmentoring.org/pubs/ws2_supplement2.pdf
- Measuring the Quality of Mentor Youth Relationships: A Tool for Mentoring Programs, Technical assistance packet.
  www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/packeight.pdf

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MENTOR is leading the national movement to connect young Americans to the power of mentoring. As a national advocate and expert resource for mentoring, in concert with a nationwide network of state and local *Mentoring Partnerships*, MENTOR delivers the research, policy recommendations, and practical performance tools needed to help make quality mentoring a reality for more of America's youth.

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