

Program Practices in Youth  
Mentoring:  
What is the Evidence Base?  
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# Background & Significance

- ***Program Practices:*** Processes used to establish and support high-quality and enduring mentoring relationships for youth in programmatic settings
- ***Program Disparity Problem:*** Programs appear to vary widely in their effectiveness, safety, efficiency, and sustainability
- ***Evidence-Based Practice Hypothesis:*** Identification of evidence-based practices central to reducing “program disparities” and thus strengthening both programs and the field as a whole

# Conceptual Issues

## ■ Criteria

- Mentoring Relationship Quality & Longevity
- Positive Impacts on Youth Development
- Avoidance of Adverse Effects
- Cost-Effectiveness/Cost-Benefit
- Program Sustainability

## ■ Typology/Dimensions

- Program Domain: Recruitment, Enrollment and Matching, Relationship Support, Monitoring/Evaluation
- Characteristics: Social processes & participants
- Intensity: Frequency, continuity, etc.

## ■ Practices vs. Programs

## ■ Localized vs. Generalized (Fidelity vs. Adaptation)

# Methodological Issues

- **Fidelity of Implementation**
- **Lack of Investigation vs. Lack of Support**
- **Breadth of Literature Considered Relevant**
- **Threats to Validity**
  - **Internal:** Rigor of study design for concluding causal effect of practice on outcome
  - **External:** Generalization of findings across differing program infrastructure, contexts, structures, goals (Karcher et al., 2006); target population (age, gender, race/ethnicity, risk status, etc.)
  - **Measurement/Statistical:** Reliability and validity of measures; appropriateness/sensitivity of statistical analyses
- **Reliability of Judgments of Evidence**
- **Operationalization of Practices and Benchmarks**

# Characterizing the Evidence

- **Proposed Levels: Supported, Promising, Potential, Unsupported, and Unexamined (Strong and Weak sublevels within each of first 3 levels)**
- **Evaluate separately for different outcomes: effectiveness, safety, efficiency, and sustainability**
- **Consider consistency and strength (magnitude) of available findings**
- **Consider allied literatures only as supplemental evidence**
- **All statements of support bounded by parameters reflecting attention to external validity (cf. SPR Standards of Evidence)**
- **Use multiple judges / expert panel**

# Characterizing the Evidence

- Supported--Strong: favorable results in research comparing outcomes w/ and w/out the practice\* using *experimental design*
- Supported--Weak: favorable results in research comparing outcomes w/ and w/out the practice\* using rigorous *quasi-experimental* design (includes unplanned variations in exposure across youth within studies and meta-analytic comparisons across studies if each include appropriate controls)

*\*Comparison must isolate the practice.*

# Characterizing the Evidence

- Promising--Strong: favorable results in *experimental* research investigating outcomes for programs (or collections of practices) that incorporate the practice
- Promising--Weak: favorable results in rigorous *quasi-experimental* research investigating outcomes for programs (or collections of practices) that incorporate the practice (includes unplanned variations in exposure across youth within studies to programs or sets of practices that include the targeted practice as well as meta-analytic comparisons across studies if each include appropriate controls)

# Characterizing the Evidence

- Potential--Strong: favorable results in rigorous *qualitative* research comparing outcomes w/ and w/out the practice (includes systematic narrative reviews)
- Potential--Weak: favorable results in case studies of programs (or youth in programs) that incorporate the practice (includes non-systematic literature reviews)

# Characterizing the Evidence

- Unsupported: unfavorable (null or opposite direction) results in experimental or rigorous quasi-experimental research comparing outcomes w/ and w/out the practice when there is adequate fidelity of implementation
- Unexamined: lack of research addressing the outcomes associated with practice

# Example

## ■ Mentor Pre-Match Training

- Effectiveness: Promising-Weak (not a significant moderator of effects in DuBois et al., 2002; mixed findings in Cavell studies comparing PrimeTime to minimal training/supervision mentoring condition; element of several programs with evidence of effectiveness, such as Across Ages; correlations between measures of training received and relationship outcomes-e.g., Parra et al., 1997; encouraging evidence from allied literatures, such as para-professional helping—see, e.g., Durlak meta-analysis)
- Safety, Efficiency, and Sustainability: Unexamined

# Next Steps

- **Develop List of Practices**
  - Sources: RPC, Elements of Effective Practice, NMC/PPV/BBBS assessment tool, scholarly reviews of the literature
- **Identify and Summarize Evidence**
  - Sources: RPC, scholarly reviews of the literature, personal knowledge, youth mentoring research listserv
  - Write report for Research & Action series
- **Evaluate Evidence**
  - Utilize Expert Panel (RPC members?)
- **Expand Evidence Base**
  - Update and expand DuBois et al. (2002) meta-analysis
  - Conduct cost-benefit analyses
- **Develop Guidelines and Resources for Evidence-Based Decision-Making by Mentoring Programs**
  - Incorporate procedures for use of internal program data