Research-Based Practices in Afterschool Mentoring Programs

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Most communities have afterschool programs that give school-aged students a safe place to go after the dismissal bell rings. The next step after simply providing a safe haven is to create a nurturing environment that develops young people's talents and supports their needs. A formal mentoring program can help to achieve this goal.

Even before Big Brothers Big Sisters of America or Boys & Girls Clubs, informal, community-based mentoring activities have built youth-adult relationships and improved youth outcomes. More recently, structured mentoring programs have been implemented in school- and community-based afterschool programs (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2015). However, the adoption of formal mentoring programs and components in afterschool settings has not been accompanied by evidence-based recommendations for developing and improving these programs.

In order to achieve the intended student outcomes, afterschool practitioners need to understand what makes mentoring models effective. To foster that understanding, we conducted a systematic review of the literature related to structured afterschool mentoring programs. Our study uncovered seven components and six activities proven through empirical research to be effective in formal afterschool mentoring programs.

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Our search also revealed descriptions of three afterschool mentoring programs that effectively implement several of these components and activities.

The Basics of Afterschool Mentoring Programs

Mentoring involves a non-parental adult working directly with a young person to develop a personal connection that aids in improving that youth's outcomes (Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2009). Afterschool settings with formal mentoring programs or mentoring components typically match students who have demonstrated academic, social, or behavioral problems with a responsible, caring adult; adult and student then engage in planned interactions according to a structured schedule. Grossman and Bulle (2006) point out that mentoring afterschool programs can vary widely: They may be school- or community-based, formal or informal. They may feature one-on-one or group mentoring, either as the primary intervention or as a component of a larger intervention in a broad-based afterschool program. Finally, mentors and mentees may be matched according to their characteristics or interests (Grossman & Bulle, 2006).

Regardless of their specific format, the mentor-mentee relationships that positively affect youth are characterized by trust, mutuality, and empathy (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005). Youth who develop a sustained trust-based relationship with a caring non-parental adult demonstrate improvements in social, emotional, and behavioral domains (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Additionally, meaningful relationships are a powerful factor in promoting resilience for students with risk factors (Laursen, 2002) and can promote improved academic achievement outcomes.

Structured, formal mentoring programs designed to improve student outcomes differ from informal relationship-building activities, yet both focus on promoting and sustaining positive mentor-mentee interactions. In a review of effective afterschool program practices, Beck (1999) highlighted six factors that promote effectiveness in afterschool mentoring: structure, support for academic achievement, cultural consistency, reliable adult participation, child-centered leadership, and program safety. Research has documented the need for structure in afterschool programs (Rorie, Gottfredson, Cross, Wilson, & Connell, 2011). Causes for the failure of mentor relationships include discontinuation by either the mentor or the mentee, inadequate formal support for mentors, and lack of program support (Spencer, 2007).

Based on the research documenting the importance of structured mentoring relationships, we limited our literature review to research on afterschool programs with formal mentoring components and comprehensive mentoring programs. We did not include informal relationship-building components in afterschool programs generally.

Method

To identify examples of effective structured afterschool mentoring programs and effective mentoring elements, we began with a comprehensive search of literature published between 2002 and 2013 in peer-reviewed journals, using the EBSCO database. Our search terms were *mentoring* plus one of the following: *extended day, after school, after-school,* or *afterschool*. We used the term *mentoring* in order to identify research on formal mentoring programs but not informal relationship-building opportunities. The second set of terms limited the search to formal mentoring in afterschool programs, not during the school day. In this initial search, we identified 1,152 articles.

To narrow the scope of the review, we used pre-determined criteria to help us identify articles that could guide practice. First, we made sure that the articles described programs with true mentoring components, in which mentors were formally matched to mentees. We excluded informal mentoring situations in which adults simply supervised young people. This criterion reduced the number of articles to 232.

Next, we looked for articles that provided empirical evidence of effectiveness through experimental or qualitative research. Most of the 232 articles were simply descriptions of programs and program components whose student outcomes had not been measured. After we applied this final criterion, we had 16 peer-reviewed articles published between 2002 and 2013. Of these, 13 highlighted effective mentoring components of broadly based afterschool programs, and three described effective afterschool programs in which mentoring was the main intervention.

Our findings from these 16 articles lead to the recommendations below for developing and improving

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afterschool mentoring efforts. First we describe the seven effective mentoring components revealed by these articles. Next come six mentoring activities that have proven their effectiveness. Then we describe the three afterschool mentoring programs, which use many of the effective components and activities. Finally, we synthesize these findings to list recommended practices for afterschool mentoring programs.

Effective Mentoring Components

Because our review encompassed only articles that included measures of effectiveness, the mentoring components described in these articles identify best practices for afterschool mentoring programs. The seven mentoring components are:

1. Support and training for mentors
2. Matching mentors with mentees by race and gender
3. Targeted recruitment of mentees who particularly need intervention
4. Group mentoring
5. Cross-age peer mentoring
6. A perspective that sees the afterschool club as "home"
7. Customized programming that uses local resources

Support and Training for Mentors

Effective afterschool programs plan for and implement support and training for adult staff. Similarly, they should also support and train mentors (Smith, 2011). Training should include a description of the program's purpose, target student population, and procedures. It should also cover a partnership agreement and provide guidance on common issues in mentoring relationships. After training, afterschool programs should give mentors time for planning and reflection. A project coordinator should provide ongoing support: helping to resolve mentor-mentee relationship issues, encouraging participation, reinforcing good behavior, and teaching mentors new strategies. Such support promotes consistency and ensures the integrity of the program's implementation while supporting mentor retention.

Matching by Race and Gender

Mentoring programs often aim to support a specific population of young people, such as African-American students or females. Our literature review suggests that, when programs target specific student populations, they should intentionally match mentors to their mentees by race and gender (Hanlon, Simon, O'Grady, Carswell, & Callaman, 2013). Matching mentees to similar mentors increases the relevance of the mentors' support

and promotes positive, successful mentor-mentee relationships.

Targeted Recruitment of Mentees

Although students of many ages and backgrounds benefit from afterschool programs in general, students who are struggling or failing in school particularly need to be recruited into afterschool mentoring programs. Our literature review highlights a particular need for mentoring in urban programs for at-risk youth (Carswell, Hanlon, O'Grady, Watts, & Pothong, 2009; Petitpas, Van Raalte, Corenelius, & Presbrey, 2004). Because afterschool mentoring programs can be particularly beneficial for struggling students, students who need intervention to prevent negative outcomes should be directly targeted with afterschool mentoring programs.

Group Mentoring

Mentoring programs can be resource intensive; meanwhile, finding effective, dependable mentors can be difficult. While most mentoring models involve a one-to-one mentor-mentee relationship, the literature we reviewed supports the use of group mentoring. Group mentoring models decrease the number of mentors needed while maintaining program effectiveness (Hanlon et al., 2013; Smith, 2011). The literature we reviewed found several afterschool group mentoring programs to be effective. For instance, Carswell and colleagues (2009) implemented a targeted mentoring intervention for high-risk African American urban youth. Group mentoring programs typically connect a small group of four to six students with one mentor. As in individual mentoring programs, mentors and mentees meet with established intention on a regular schedule. Afterschool programs are conducive to group mentoring because a common meeting place and time have already been established.

Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

Cross-age peer mentoring, in which the mentor is a young person rather than an adult, is another strategy for decreasing the number of adult mentors needed for an afterschool mentoring program. Peer mentors are typically older than their mentees; for example, high school mentors might be paired with elementary students. Our literature review indicated that cross-age peers can be as effective as adult mentors, if not more so. For instance, Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken (2011) implemented a peer mentoring program where

the mentor was a university student and the mentees were students identified as being at risk for school failure. Peer mentoring can benefit not only the mentees but also the peer mentors (Herrera et al., 2011). In some programs, peer mentors themselves receive support from an older mentor.

Club as Home

A warm, inviting environment can make the afterschool club feel like home. This perception depends on the intensive relationship building that characterizes effective afterschool mentoring programs (Jones & Deutsch, 2010). When afterschool settings promote supportive, compassionate mentoring, mentees feel familiar and comfortable with the location, resources, staff, and other students.

Customized Programming Using Local Resources

Some mentoring characteristics and activities are pre-determined for use by afterschool programs across communities. For instance, national afterschool programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters or the sports program described by Petitpas and colleagues (2004) supply broad activity guidelines and structures to local programs. However, individual programs should also use local resources to supplement such programming and customize it to their communities (Petitpas et al., 2004). Examples of local resources that can be integrated into national afterschool programs include university support, case management, and community activities This approach has demonstrated effectiveness in providing mentoring programs for local students. It also promotes a community of care for struggling students.

Effective Mentoring Activities

In addition to mentoring program components, our search of the literature yielded examples of six specific mentoring activities that have been shown to have a positive effect in afterschool programs:

1. Authentic activities aligned with interests common to both mentor and mentee
2. Tutoring or remediation of academic skills
3. Health promotion
4. Sports
5. Apprenticeship of discrete skills
6. Ethnic identity development

Providing authentic activities that involve interests common to both mentor and mentee is aligned with the practice of matching mentors and mentees based on gender and race. Common interests around which afterschool activities might be built include computers, electronic games, sports, or a subject area such as science. Activities based on common interests allow mentor and mentee to work on something they both enjoy. The shared focus serves as a foundation on which to build the relationship (Denner, Meyer, & Bean, 2005; Hanlon et al., 2013).

Another effective activity for mentors and mentees in afterschool programs is academic tutoring or remediation of skill deficits (Hanlon et al., 2013; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Saddler & Staulters, 2008). Mentors might provide homework help, instruction in a discrete skill such as multiplication, or remediation of a specific skill such as reading.

Several afterschool mentoring programs described in the literature we reviewed included a health promotion focus, which was effective in improving students' perceptions and habits (Bruening, 2009; Smith, 2011). The mentors in these programs followed scripted programs to educate mentees on such topics as proper nutrition and exercise, encouraging mentees to make healthy, positive choices.

Similarly, several afterschool mentoring programs focused on using sports to build mentor-mentee relationships similar to coach-athlete relationships. Sporting activities combine mentee interests with healthy exercise while fostering a positive mentor-mentee rapport (Bruening, 2009; Petitpas et al., 2004).

Apprenticeship mentoring activities integrate common interests and skill building, forming a task-focused relationship between the mentor and the mentee (Halpern, 2006). For instance, Clark and Sheridan (2010) implemented an afterschool mentoring program

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that trained mentees to improve their skills in software game design and animation through collaboration with mentors at an afterschool clubhouse.

Finally, afterschool mentoring programs that include ethnic or personal identity development have also been found to be effective (Hanlon et al., 2013; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004). These programs provide explicit instruction related to mentees' ethnic identity, such as African-American heritage, and support personal traits associated with the best aspects of that culture. Personal and ethnic identity development programs incorporate mentor-mentee matching and activities of common interest to support personal growth.

Model Afterschool Mentoring Programs

Our review of the literature yielded three examples of comprehensive afterschool mentoring programs that integrated several of the effective components and activities described above. All three programs were proven through quantitative or qualitative evaluation to have a positive effect on student outcomes.

University and Community-Based Partnership

Grineski (2003) describes a part-nership between a university and a community-based organization that paired third-year education students with local youth ages 9–13 years old. Youth participants were recruited from low-income neighborhoods, in keeping with the targeted recruitment component described above. As recommended in the literature, mentors were supported not only by their university coursework but also by training and ongoing discussions with the university mentoring program coordinator (Grineski, 2003).

Many of the program activities Grineski (2003) describes match the activities shown to be effective in the literature. Mentees, who participated in a broad-based afterschool program, met once a week with their mentors, with whom they were matched by race and gender. During their time together, mentors and mentees participated in activities including not only academic tutoring and homework help but also child-driven, mutually agreed recreational activities such as ice skating and bowling. Additionally, mentors and mentees attended special events including campus carnivals and community tours. The partnership used local resources, such as a healthy community initiative, city recreation and police departments, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses. A caring atmosphere made the club feel like home. Mentors met with families of their mentees to understand the contexts that shaped the students' lives (Grineski, 2003).

The program's effectiveness was evaluated by measuring student outcomes (Grineski, 2003). Qualitative data and surveys of both mentor and mentee experiences provided the methodological framework to gauge the effectiveness of the program. Another survey examined student decision-making skills. Mentees wrote reflections that gave information to program coordinators and the class professor about program effectiveness. All mentees said on their surveys that they felt better about themselves because of their mentors, and 95 percent of the college students felt better about themselves because of their mentoring work (Grineski, 2003).

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Afterschool Program for Latino/a Students

The group mentoring program described by Diversi and Mecham (2005) aimed to empower adolescents to find academic success while embracing their bicultural identity. Meeting after school twice a week for 1.5 hours, 20–25 students in grades 8 and 9 were mentored by four or five college students in small groups. Recruitment targeted students who had academic or behavioral issues at school. Mentors promoted academic achievement by providing help with homework and school projects. They also worked with mentees to identify activities to develop acculturation and heighten their awareness of biculturalism, race, and history. Discussions included topics such as code switching, the culture of rap, and "Spanglish." Additionally, mentors and mentees participated in community life with activities such as hiking, camping, and attending festivals. The structure of the program was adult-driven, with support for the mentors, while the mentoring activities were youth-driven, tapping common interests. Training for mentors included exploration of such topics as adolescent development, ethnicity, immigration, and acculturation. This afterschool mentoring program adhered to the "club as home" approach by promoting a sense of belonging and openness (Diversi & Mecham, 2005).

Diversi and Mecham (2005) used an ethnographic method to analyze effectiveness. Those leading the study used participant observation and action research to analyze the adult-youth relationships. Additionally, mentors participated in group and individual interviews, observation, and reflective essays that provided qualitative data to show the effectiveness of the adult-youth partnership in empowering Latino/a youth. Program results showed that youth found trust and satisfaction in their relationship. Additionally, program coordinators saw improvement in youths' grades, an increase in homework completion, and improvement in interpersonal communicative skills and academic language proficiency (Diversi & Mecham, 2005).

Young Women Leaders Program

A study by Denner and colleagues examined the effectiveness of a program that aimed to develop female leaders through one-on-one mentoring and a structured group format. The program paired female college mentors with seventh-grade girls. School personnel nominated mentees who were struggling academically, socio-emotionally, or behaviorally but who showed leadership potential. College women applied for the program and were selected by university personnel (Denner et al., 2005).

Mentor-mentee pairs were placed in groups of up to ten pairs based on schedules, interests, and racial and ethnic diversity. These groups met weekly at the students' school for structured group sessions led by experienced facilitators. Both facilitators and mentors took a class on working with adolescent girls and received ongoing training and support. The mentoring activities included promotion of female empowerment, a naturally occurring common interest between mentors and mentees who were all female. Additionally, mentees participated in identity development activities promoting partnerships, engagement, and personal expression. Mentors also met one-on-one with their mentees outside of this group time. During the year of the study, mentor-mentee pairs spent an average of 25 hours in their groups and 20 hours outside of the groups (Denner et al., 2005).

The mixed-method study conducted by Denner and colleagues (2005) analyzed relationship quality, group experience, trust building, and effective practices, using such methods as anecdotal notes, responses to an end-of-program essay, and structured interviews with mentees.

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This collection of data yielded important emerging themes regarding the afterschool mentoring program and relationships between mentors and mentees. The two primary themes were "guidance, not instruction" and "creating a place to be authentic" (Denner et al., 2005). From these two primary themes emerged seven recommended practices on how to promote strong mentor-mentee relationships that empower young women. These practices include establishing a safe environment, providing varying leadership styles, incorporating mentee interests and choices, creating a climate in which everyone's voice can be heard and respected, and ensuring that mentors are open to discussing personal challenges and issues with mentees.

Recommended Practices

This review of the afterschool mentoring literature base highlights specific mentoring components, activities, and program models. The findings can inform future program development and help practitioners improve existing programs and program evaluation practices.

Given the paucity of literature that includes outcome measures, the first recommendation is to improve the measurement of the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Relevant and reliable quantitative indicators of student outcomes include academic achievement, occurrences of discipline, school attendance, and teacher ratings of student behavior. In addition, qualitative methodologies allow researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of mentoring programs or components through interviews and observations.

The next set of recommended practices is for afterschool mentoring programs to include as many of the seven effective components and six effective activities as possible, while eliminating contrary practices. Such practices as support and training for mentors, recruitment of mentees based on a need for prevention or intervention, a formal matching process by race and gender, student-driven group or individual mentoring activities, and a "club as home" environment, along with individualized programming and cross-age mentoring, have demonstrated their effectiveness in afterschool mentoring programs.

The findings also suggest that afterschool mentoring programs require program evaluation and improvement

in order to align with the effective components and activities revealed in the literature. There is a growing emphasis today on evaluation of afterschool programs (Huang, Cho, Mostafavi, & Nam, 2010). Ongoing evaluation enables programs to improve and grow (Huang & Dietel, 2011). Either internal or external evaluation can be used to assess the effectiveness of afterschool programming (Huang et al., 2010). Internal evaluation, which can be formal or informal, can include conversations with students, parents, and staff in addition to collection of test scores, attendance records, and grades. A more formal internal evaluation may also include surveys of participant satisfaction, pre- and post-participation testing, and assessment of staff. University researchers or private evaluation organizations can perform external evaluations, so that the information is gathered by outsiders who can conduct an unbiased evaluation rather than by program staff. Whether internal or external, evaluations provide necessary information on the program's success in terms of students' academic progress and enjoyment of the program (Huang & Dietel, 2011).

On completion of the evaluation, program leaders should begin planning for improvement and sustainability, determining the resources necessary to enhance program effectiveness and addressing feasibility. For example, an afterschool mentoring program might conduct an evaluation that includes mentor and mentee surveys and comparison of student grades before and after program completion. If the evaluation finds that mentees felt abandoned and that grades did not change over time, program leaders should assess the program's alignment with the components identified as effective in the literature and develop a plan to improve implementation of the components that are not being carried out with integrity. Similarly, if a program began with the premise that mentors would determine the activities in which they engage with mentees, the program evaluation might show that mentees were not motivated to participate and did not relate with their mentors. That program might then consider the list of effective mentoring activities and modify the model to include student-driven, mutually agreed upon activities of interest to both mentors and mentees.

Today's youth need adult guidance to navigate an often complicated society and their transition into adulthood. Formal, structured afterschool mentoring programs can help them develop academic skills, build relationships, improve social capital, and improve behavioral and social outcomes. The seven effective program components, six types of effective activities, and three models of comprehensive afterschool mentoring programs highlighted in this literature review provide a basis for practices in program development, evaluation, and improvement that can enhance student outcomes.

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