Understanding and Facilitating
the Youth Mentoring Movement

Jean E. Rhodes and David L. DuBois

Abstract

In this report, we review current scientific knowledge on the topic of youth mentoring, including what is known about relationships and programs, and their interface with organizations and institutions. Two primary conclusions can be drawn from this review. First, mentoring relationships are most likely to promote positive outcomes and avoid harm when they are close, consistent, and enduring. Second, to date, programs have achieved only limited success in their efforts to establish and sustain such relationships. This is evident in a modest and inconsistent pattern of effects on youth outcomes, well-documented implementation problems, and a lack of compelling evidence of cost-effectiveness. We also review public policy issues in the field, focusing on factors underlying the popularity of youth mentoring in the US and recent efforts to extend its reach. We argue that these factors have had undesirable consequences that include decreasing intensity and infrastructure support for youth mentoring programs as well as a failure to take advantage of the full range of opportunities to cultivate and sustain mentoring relationships across different contexts of youth development. We call for a better alignment of research and practice in the area of youth mentoring, recommending policies that (a) promote evidence-based innovation, rigorous evaluation, and careful replication in dissemination for youth mentoring programs, and (b) encourage intentional and scientifically informed approaches to mentoring across the full-spectrum of youth-serving settings.

From the Editor

In the current issue of the *Social Policy Report*, Jean Rhodes and David DuBois review research on mentoring and consider the implications for policies that promote mentoring. One of their most important points is that mentoring programs have increased in popularity and proliferated without adequate attention to what we know from research; equally important is that there are many questions about mentoring for which we do not yet know the answers so that more research is needed before we can fully adopt mentoring as an important development-promoting vehicle.

There is good research demonstrating that a meaningful relationship between a young person and an adult is important to positive developmental outcomes. This is one of those robust research findings that also just makes sense to academicians, practitioners, and the public at large. As a result, we have adopted mentoring as an important program vehicle to promote youth development. Rhodes and DuBois' review of research and programs, however, documents how critical it is to structure programs with features that research demonstrates work for specific populations. While the approach of mentoring may seem promising, how to implement the approach in an effective manner is by no means clear, and implementation requires careful scientific evaluations of programs so that we understand which program components are most powerful.

In most cases, a parent or relative serves as a mentor to their child, although it is not clear whether a relationship with a non-parental figure is also and independently important. And, in some cases, a mentoring relationship naturally forms between a young person and a teacher, neighbor, or program staff person. Institutionally creating such relationships is quite a different matter. It requires knowledge of what works with mentoring relationships that spontaneously and naturally arise, and then the design of programs that are carefully evaluated.

Brooke and I hope that this *SPR* will serve to redirect attention in the field from this somewhat unbridled expansion of programs to research that helps us understand how such expansion should occur. The message is as relevant to the private sector that underwrites many mentoring programs as it is to the public sector that promotes programs and funds research. There are few other areas where the research-program/policy connection is as badly needed. We all want to do our best for our young people; however, we can do so only if we base our actions on what we know. This field needs to attend more fully to what we now know and to encourage further research on those questions for which we do not currently have answers.

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Understanding and Facilitating the Youth Mentoring Movement
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Three million young people are in formal one-to-one mentoring relationships in the US, a sixfold increase from just a decade ago, and funding and growth imperatives continue to fuel program expansion (MENTOR, 2006a). Anecdotal reports of mentors' protective qualities are corroborated by a growing body of research, which has underscored the positive influence of mentors in the lives of youth. In the following sections, we review existing research on mentoring relationships and programs. We then critically examine the policy climate surrounding youth mentoring initiatives and make recommendations for facilitating future development and growth of the mentoring movement.

Researching Mentoring Relationships

A growing number of studies have revealed significant associations between youth's involvement in mentoring relationships and positive developmental outcomes (see DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Rhodes, 2002; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Behrendt , 2005). Illustratively, in a recent investigation with data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b), involving a nationally representative sample of adolescents who were first assessed when in grades 7-12, those who reported having experienced a mentoring relationship since the age of 14 exhibited better outcomes (controlling where possible for the same or related measures at the start of the study) within the domains of education/work (high school completion, college attendance, employment), mental health (self-esteem, life satisfaction), problem behavior (gang membership, physical fighting, risk taking), and health (exercise, birth control). Studies examining specific characteristics of mentoring relationships have suggested that the bonds are most likely to promote positive outcomes when they share a core of common characteristics. At the most basic level, a necessary condition for an effective mentoring relationship is that the two people involved feel connected—that there is mutual trust and a sense that one is understood, liked, and respected. The closeness of a relationship, however, is affected by individual, dyadic, and contextual factors.

Closeness. Without some connection, the dynamics that make mentoring relationships effective are unlikely ever to occur. Indeed, after examining over 600 pairs, Herrera, Sipe, and McClanahan (2000, p. 31) observed that "at the crux of the mentoring relationship is the bond that forms between the youth and mentor. If a bond does not form, then youth and mentors may disengage from the match before the mentoring relationship lasts long enough to have a positive impact on youth." Such feelings of closeness in formal mentoring ties have been found to mediate linkages between other relationship characteristics and perceived benefits for the youth (Parra et al., 2002) and, in informal mentoring, have predicted favorable youth outcomes in areas such as mental health and substance use independent of frequency of contact and relationship duration (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a).

Close emotional connections between youth and mentors appear to be fostered by factors resembling those identified as important in effective therapeutic relationships, such as empathy and authenticity (Spencer, 2006), but also by the experience of simply having fun and enjoying each other's company (Spencer & Rhodes, 2005). It also helps when there is a basic compatibility between the youth and mentor in their personalities, interests, and expectations or goals for the relationship (Bernier & Larose, 2005; Madia & Lutz, 2004). It is noteworthy, however, that similarity in the ethnic or racial backgrounds of the mentor and youth has not emerged as a significant factor, despite the importance often attributed to this in practice (Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, & Lee, 2003; Sanchez & Colon, 2005). Finally, it's important to note that close youth-adult mentoring relationships are not immune from conflict and other negative emotional experiences (e.g., disappointment) and that these may have an adverse impact on youth, as well as the sustainability of the relationship (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005).

The formation of a close relationship is conditioned by several factors, including the background characteristics of the mentor, the effectiveness of the mentor in addressing the developmental needs of the child, the consistency and duration of the tie, and the broader program and community context in which the relation-

ship unfolds.

Mentor characteristics. Close, effective mentoring relationships seem to be facilitated when adults possess certain skills and attributes. These include prior experience in helping roles or occupations (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002), an ability to demonstrate appreciation of salient socioeconomic and cultural influences in the youth's life (Hirsch, 2005), and a sense of efficacy for being able to mentor young people (DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002; Hirsch, 2005; Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005; Parra, DuBois, Neville, Pugh-Lilly, & Povinelli, 2002). The ability to model relevant behaviors, such as skills required for job performance in the work setting, appears to be of further benefit (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005) as does refraining from actions (e.g., substance use) that may encourage youth to adopt unhealthy behaviors (Beam, Gil-Rivas, Greenberger, & Chen, 2002).

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Several lines of research also converge in calling attention to a youth-centered approach to mentoring, which focuses on the developmental needs of the youth. Relationships that are youth-centered (sometimes also referred to as developmental) in their orientation, as opposed to being driven primarily by the interests or expectations of the mentor (sometimes also referred to as prescriptive), have been found to predict greater relationship quality and duration (Herrera et al., 2000; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Styles & Morrow, 1992) as well as improvements in how youth experience their relationships with other adults (Karcher, Roy-Carlson, Benne, Gil-Hernandez, Allen, & Gomez, 2006a). Helping youth to set and work toward goals that are important to their development also appears to be beneficial (Balcazar, Davies, Viggers, & Tranter, in press; Balcazar, Keys, & Garate, 1995; Davidson & Redner, 1988; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005), especially if the goals are agreed upon by mentor and youth in accordance with the youth-centered approach described above (Larose, Chaloux, Monaghan, & Tarabulsy, 2006). This latter consideration is consistent with other research suggesting that balanced attention to multiple sets of potentially competing concerns may be necessary to achieve optimal results when mentoring youth within a developmental frame-

work. In one of these studies applying cluster analysis to relationship data from a study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program (Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004), outcomes were most favorable when youth reported experiencing both structure and support from their mentors; by contrast, no benefits were evident for an unconditional support relationship type, thus suggesting a need for mentors to be more than simply "good friends." Adult advisors in other types of programs and activities similarly appear to be most effective when their interactions with youth reflect sensitivity to the needs of youth for not only ownership and autonomy, but also structure and scaffolding (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005). In accordance with these findings, the successful development of a mentoring relationship with a young person appears to be more likely when the adult demonstrates attunement to the needs and interests of the youth and the ability to adapt his or her approach accordingly (Pryce, 2006; Spencer, 2006).

Consistency. Studies of both informal and formal mentoring ties highlight the significance of how often mentors and youth spend time together (Blakely, Menon, & Jones, 1995; DuBois & Neville, 1997; DuBois, Neville, et al., 2002; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a; Freedman, 1988; Herrera et al., 2000; McLearn, Colasanto, & Schoen, 1998; Parra et al., 2002). Regular contact has been linked to positive youth outcomes indirectly via its role in affording other desirable processes to take root in the mentoring relationship. For example, regular meetings may lead to engagement in beneficial activities (Parra et al., 2002), the provision of emotional and instrumental support (Herrera et al., 2000), and a deeper integration of the adult into the youth's social network (DuBois, Neville, et al., 2002). The reliable involvement of a caring non-parental adult in a youth's life may offer more direct benefits as well in the form of enhanced feelings of security and attachment in interpersonal relationships (Keller, 2005b; Rhodes, 2005).

Duration. The benefits of mentoring appear to accure with time. In a reanalysis of data from the P/PV study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that positive effects on youth outcomes became progressively stronger as relationships

persisted for longer periods of time. The greatest benefits were evident for youth in relationships that lasted one year or longer. By contrast, youth in relationships that lasted less than 6 months (i.e., less than half the one year commitment that volunteers were asked to make) showed declines in functioning relative to controls. The preceding trends were apparent even when considering potential confounding influences such as baseline characteristics of youth that could contribute to increased risk for premature termination. These findings suggest that, for mentoring relationships to yield benefits, they should endure for at least one year. An equally important consideration, however, may be whether relationships are continued for the full duration of whatever expectations are reestablished, even if these are for a considerably shorter period of time (De Ayala & Perry, 2005; Larose, Tarabulsy, & Cyrenne, 2005). It seems likely, moreover, that the amount of time needed for beneficial mentoring to occur also depends on other factors such as the characteristics and needs of the youth, the mentor's skills and background, the frequency of contact in the relationship, and the specific outcome(s) under consideration (Rhodes, 2002). The time frame over which gains from mentoring ties continue to accrue and thus are maximized is not well-established. It appears, however, that relationships may be especially beneficial when they remain part of the youth's life for multiple years (Klaw, Fitzgerald, & Rhodes, 2003; McLearn et al., 1998) and thus have the opportunity to facilitate adaptation throughout significant portions of their development (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b; Werner, 1995).

Contextual variables. Although the focus in most mentoring research has been on dyadic relationships between adults and youth, recent investigations have indicated the importance of connections between mentoring relationships and the broader interpersonal contexts in which they occur (Keller, 2005a). These include benefits of providing mentoring in a group context that includes not only multiple peers (Herrera, Vang, & Gale, 2002; Hirsch, 2005; House, Kuperminc, & Lapidus, 2005), but also multiple adults who can collaborate with one another (Hirsch, DuBois, & Deutsch, 2006). There is also evidence that mentoring can facilitate gains in the relationships youth have with parents, peers, and other adults such as teachers (Karcher, Roy-Carlson, Benne, Gil-Hernandez, Allen, & Gomez, 2006b; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995) and that these improvements, in turn, are involved in mediating positive effects of mentoring on outcomes such as academic achievement (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000), substance use (Rhodes, Reddy, & Grossman, 2005), and emotional health (DuBois, Neville, et al., 2002). Furthermore, it appears that when a mentor develops linkages with key persons in the youth's social network, such as parents (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002) or peers (Hirsch, 2005), effectiveness is enhanced.

Limitations. When youth experience mentoring relationships that reflect the characteristics reviewed in the previous sections, these relationships may harbor remarkable potential to realize the type of transformative influence on long-term health and adjustment that have been central to arguments for expanding mentoring initiatives. Yet, when these features are lacking, it is equally apparent that mentoring relationships may fall well short of their potential benefits, and even do harm. These circumstances may include, for example, a lack of compatibility in the personality or interests of the youth and mentor; insufficient skills or abilities on the part of the mentor; an irregular or infrequent pattern of contact; brief or less than expected duration; the absence of a close, emotional bond; mentor behaviors that do reflect sensitivity to the full range of the youth's developmental needs; and weak or missing linkages to the youth's social network. These possibilities may help to account for the generally modest magnitude of the associations found between mentoring relationships and youth outcomes and a lack of consistency in findings across all areas of functioning. In the study referred to previously that utilized data from the Add Health study (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b), for example, the estimated benefits of having had a mentor in adolescence were generally not large enough to offset the estimated negative consequences associated with individual or en-

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vironmental risk factors. Having a mentor, furthermore, was not predictive of benefits in several areas such as substance use (e.g., smoking), mental health problems (e.g., depression), or physical health.

It should be noted, however, that existing findings are subject to the influence of several methodological limitations (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005c). Illustratively, research to date has focused predominantly on the estimated effects of a single mentoring relationship, typically at a single point in the youth's development. The more substantial benefits that may be associated with access to multiple mentoring relationships throughout the course of childhood and adolescence, therefore, remain largely uncharted, although the value of both life course (Werner, 1995) and network (Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, in press) perspectives is clearly suggested by existing research. The implications of different com-

binations or profiles of relationship characteristics as well as the modifying influence of varying constellations of individual and environmental factors that may either enhance or attenuate consequences for youth are similarly under-studied, but again appear to be an important consideration (e.g., Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). Thus, although many useful implications can be drawn from existing research on mentoring relationships and their role in youth development, there are also numerous significant issues in need of clarification.

The Role of Mentoring in Programs and Organizations

From a policy perspective, it is critical to understand the extent to which programs and other organizational contexts can serve as vehicles for establishing or cultivating close, effective mentoring relationships, and to

Table 1

Research-Supported Mentoring Program Practices

	Theory-Based[a]	Empirically Based[b]
Monitoring of Program Implementation	X	X
Setting for Mentoring Activities		X[c]
Screening of Prospective Mentors	X	
Mentor Background: Helping Role or Profession		X
Mentor/Youth Matching	X	
Mentor Pre-Match Training	X	
Expectations: Frequency of Contact	X	X
Expectations: Length of Relationship	X	
Supervision	X	
Ongoing Training	X	X
Mentor Support Group	X	
Structured Activities for Mentors and Youth	X	X
Parent Support/Involvement	X	X

Note. Based on findings from a meta-analysis of evaluations of youth mentoring programs (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002).
[a]Practices emphasized previously as important in the mentoring program literature (e.g., National Mentoring Working Group, 1991). Higher scores on an index of the number of these practices utilized by a program predicted larger effect sizes. [b]Practices that individually in the meta-analysis were found to predict significantly larger effect sizes. Higher scores on an index of the number of these practices utilized by a program predicted larger effect sizes. [c]Programs in community and other settings outside of school (e.g., workplace) yielded larger effect sizes.
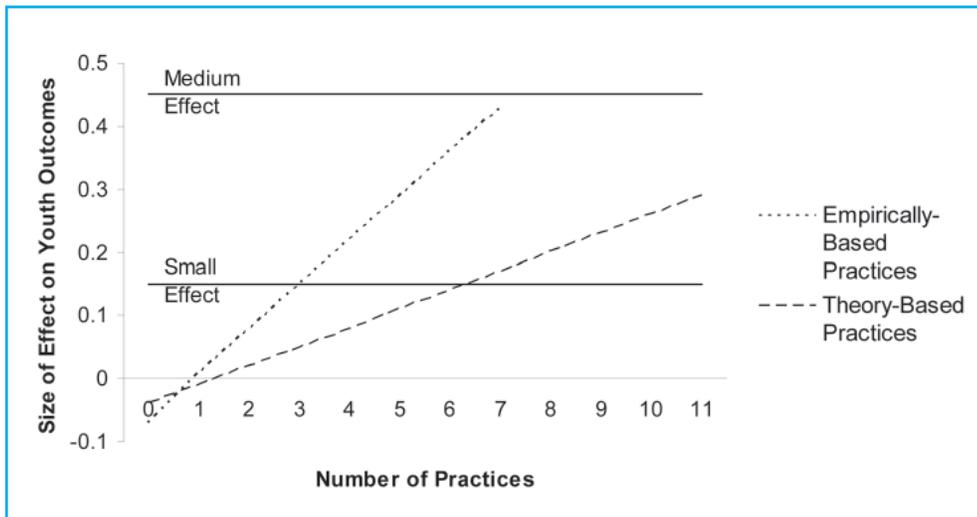
Figure 1. Relationship between utilization of greater numbers of research-supported practices and effect size in evaluations of youth mentoring programs (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). Thresholds for small and medium effects are from Lipsey (1990).

delineate practices and setting features that facilitate this goal. A considerable amount of research has addressed each of these concerns.

Formal mentoring programs. In formal mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, mentoring relationships are established by matching youth with adult volunteers. In a meta-analysis of over 50 evaluations of mentoring programs, DuBois, Holloway, et al. (2002) found evidence of benefits for participating youth on a range of emotional, behavioral, social, academic, and career development outcomes (see also Jekielek, Moore, & Hair, 2002). The estimated magnitude of program impacts, however, was small (Cohen's d = .14). Similarly, findings from the few studies that collected follow-up assessments did not suggest the types of broad, transformative effects on young people at later stages of their development that are central to arguments offered for investment in mentoring initiatives (Walker, 2005). In some instances, for example, effects have faded to nonsignificance within only a few months of program participation (Aseltine et al., 2000). Evaluations also have routinely reported significant implementation problems that have compromised the ability of programs to establish and support high-quality mentoring relationships. As would be expected, youth experiencing relationships of lower quality in programs have had less favorable outcomes (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). The preceding trends may account for the disappointing

results of preliminary efforts to gauge cost-benefit ratios for youth mentoring programs (Aos et al., 2004). These include an estimate that benefits of participation in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, derived from findings of the landmark Public/Private Ventures study (described in a later section of this report; Tierney et al., 1995), exceeded costs by only the narrowest of margins (estimate of $1.01 benefit for each $1.00 of cost) when including both taxpayer and other costs.

The DuBois, Holloway, et al. (2002) meta-analysis, however, found wide variation in the effectiveness of mentoring programs. It was demonstrated, furthermore, that the magnitude of program impacts increased systematically in conjunction with the use of greater numbers of practices that the investigators included in theory-based and empirically based practice indexes (see Table 1). The practices included in each index were identified based on prior recommendations in the field (theory-based) or the findings of the meta-analysis itself (empirically-based). As illustrated in Figure 1, when the full complement of such practices is used, predicted effect sizes are notably more impressive, although still not large by conventional standards. Empirically driven approaches that draw on a wider range of sources of data, such as input from stakeholder groups (e.g., youth) and piloting of intervention procedures, could yield programs with greater demonstrated benefits (DuBois et al., in press).

Existing research pertains predominantly to programs that adhere to a model with several common features: a) mentors and youth are paired with each other on a one-on-one basis and spend time together on an in-person basis; b) the mentor is an adult volunteer; and c) mentors and youth are largely free to spend time together in a range of different activities and settings. Recent years, however, have witnessed widespread implementation of programs that represent significant departures from this model. These alternative models include: group mentoring programs in which several youth may be mentored by a single adult; e-mentoring programs in which men-

tors and youth communicate over the internet; peer mentoring programs in which older youth are utilized as mentors; and site-based models in which interactions between youth and mentors are limited to a particular setting such as school (DuBois & Rhodes, in press). At present, very little reliable information exists concerning the effectiveness of these newer program models.

The integration of mentoring into multi-component youth development and prevention programs is another prominent trend. At present, the "value added" benefits of mentoring in the context of other programs and services are not well established. The most favorable results, however, are evident when mentoring is used as a vehicle for delivering or brokering access to other services rather than simply being an "add on" and hence having little or no connection to other program components (Kuperminc et al., 2005).

Youth-serving programs, organizations, and institutions. Informal mentoring relationships are decidedly more prevalent than those established through formal programs (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). It is thus noteworthy that a growing body of research calls attention to the significance of relationships between young people and the adults with whom they come into contact more naturally through their participation in youth-serving programs, organizations, and institutions. These studies point to the value of support and mentoring that youth receive from adults in the school setting (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002; Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003; Rhodes & Fredriksen, 2004), after-school and sports activities (Hirsch, 2005; Rhodes, 2004; Smith & Smoll, 2002), and service-learning and workplace training programs (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005). Initial research suggests several factors that may promote positive adult-youth relationships in these types of contexts (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005; Hirsch, 2005; Pianta et al., 2002; Rhodes, 2004): staff training and development, favorable adult-youth ratios, extended periods of exposure to the same staff, availability of quality programs, and an organizational climate and culture supportive of mentoring. There is evidence that youth-

adult relationships can be enhanced through intervention strategies that target such factors (Pianta et al., 2002; Smith & Smoll, 2002), although the development and evaluation of these types of initiatives lags well behind that of formal mentoring programs.

Differential effectiveness based on individual and environmental risk. In general, mentoring programs targeting youth experiencing conditions of environmental risk (e.g., socioeconomic disadvantage) have yielded stronger effects (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). Similarly, supportive relationships with adults in other settings such as schools (DuBois, Felner, Meares, & Krier, 1994) and after-school programs (Hirsch, 2005; Mahoney, Schweder, & Stattin, 2002) appear to be especially beneficial for young people exposed to significant adversity in other parts of their lives. The picture is less clear with regard to indicators of individual level risk, such as academic failure, teen pregnancy, maltreatment, or juvenile delinquency (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, in press). Programs targeting youth identified solely by markers of individual vulnerability, on average, have failed to yield favorable impacts and appear, moreover, prone to produce negative or harmful effects when desirable program practices are not in place (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002; Rhodes, 2002). In the context of accompanying environmental adversity, vulnerable youth have exhibited more positive responses to mentoring (e.g., Hughes, Cavell, Meehan, Zhang, & Collie, 2005), perhaps in part because there is then less stigma and negative labeling associated with their participation in programs (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). In view of the limited attention that such issues have received, however, especially for the specific populations that are the focus of recent policy initiatives in mentoring (e.g., children of incarcerated parents), as well as the evolving status of interventions themselves, further research will be needed to clarify the role of individual and environmental risk in shaping the responsiveness of youth to programs.

Mentoring and Public Policy

Taken together, research on mentoring processes and

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outcomes provides needed guidance to the field. The findings are complex and replete with qualifications and nuances that underscore the need for careful adherence to evidence-based practice and measured expansion of new program models. Nonetheless, public policy appears to be running on a separate track from mentoring research, with enthusiasm for new approaches often outpacing the scientific knowledge base. What accounts for this mismatch and for the somewhat unbridled growth of mentoring as a social intervention over the past 15 years? There are many sociopolitical influences, but an important tipping point came with the publication of the previously noted impact study of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA), conducted by researchers at Public/Private Ventures in Philadelphia in the mid-1990s (Tierney et al., 1995). The report summarizing the results of this study, and the widespread publicity that it received, was an important impetus for what flourished into a wider mentoring movement. The findings provided scientific justification for policymakers and practitioners from across the political spectrum to promote mentoring and, more than a decade later, continue to undergird the new generation of programs (Walker, 2005). Findings were cited on the floor of the U.S. Senate, and in research, news, and opinion pieces. Indeed, our recent Internet search of the report's title yielded about 70,000 hits. Riding the public tide of enthusiasm, BBBSA has more than tripled in size since the study was released (BBBSA, 2005).

On second glance. But how much of a difference did the intervention really make? The study included over a thousand youth who applied to one of eight urban Big Brothers Big Sisters programs. The evaluators tracked the experiences of youth given access to the program over time *and* the experiences of a control group of similar youth not given access to the program. After 18 months, the two groups were compared on various outcomes. Although youth in both groups showed decrements in functioning over time, those in the mentoring group declined more slowly than the controls. Effect sizes varied considerably, depending on the character-

istics of the individuals involved and the relationships formed, but were generally small (average pre-post and post-program difference effect size estimates were Cohen's d = .02 and .05, respectively) (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). And, interestingly, as noted earlier, it is by no means clear that these benefits comfortably exceeded program costs (Aos et al., 2004).

Despite the modest and somewhat nuanced findings of the evaluation, it fell on fertile soil. Mentoring was an idea whose time had come—and the group differences that were highlighted in the evaluation report provided a sufficiently upbeat message to inspire hope. After decades of disappointing results from large-scale, government-sponsored social policy initiatives, the notion that a straightforward, relatively inexpensive, volunteer-based approach could redress the needs of our nation's youth was both comforting and compelling (Walker, 2005). And, because this approach locates the problem (a lack of role models) and solution (deployment of middle-class volunteers) at the personal level, it fits neatly with beliefs that are central to modern conservative thinking about upward mobility and the "pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps" American ideology (Walker, 2005). Consequently mentoring won the hearts and minds of powerful allies and a disillusioned public eager to embrace formulations and solutions that highlighted individual frailty and redemption over structural impediments and change.

This tendency to privilege personal over contextual factors is something that psychologists refer to as "the fundamental attribution error" (Mednick, 1989; Watson, de Bortali-Tregerthan, & Frank, 1984). There is also a tendency to rely on personal experience to guide one's own behavior, even in the face of more compelling research findings (Brigham, 1986). Research stemming from behavioral decision theory has demonstrated how people develop simplified models of the world for directing their own behavior based on what is familiar and emotionally gratifying (Betsch, 2005). In this regard, many adults can recall the importance of one caring adult—be it their teacher, coach or neighbor—who has

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made a difference in their lives. In essence, mentoring had enormous face validity: it looked and felt like the sort of intervention that should work, our instincts and the evaluation report told us that it could work, and we wanted it to work. And, as is clear from the research summarized previously, there is ample evidence that quality mentoring programs can work.

As mentoring began to be championed by powerful constituencies, there grew a general impatience with the limited reach of existing programs. Despite strenuous efforts, many programs struggled to recruit enough volunteers who could make the typical yearlong, weekly commitment and it was not uncommon for youth to be wait-listed for upwards of two years (Rhodes, 2002). The Presidents' Summit for America's Future soon followed, where the goal of creating two million mentor relationships by the year 2000 drew national attention. Mentoring was also a key rationale for establishing America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth, which Colin Powell chaired. This initiative helped to propel the work of advocacy organizations, most notably the One to One Partnership (now MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership) that had been founded earlier in the decade (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). This organization has established a system of statewide partnerships that provide technical assistance and training to local mentoring programs and leads efforts to engage volunteers, corporations and other leaders at the state and local level. Resulting in part from their vigorous advocacy, increased funding for mentoring programs became available through a widening array of federal, state, and private sources. Federal funding for mentoring programs, for example, has increased substantially over the past decade, with annual Congressional appropriations of $100 million since 2004 (though the most recent budget proposal calls for a 40% reduction in this allocation) (MENTOR, 2006a).

Responding in part to internal pressures for growth, and external competition for funding, BBBSA announced vigorous growth goals. The organization cur-

rently serves 300,000 youth (up from around 100,000 in the mid-1990s), but has its sights set on reaching nearly a half million by next year and one million by 2010 (BBBSA, 2006). The Corporation for National and Community Service recently saw and raised this ante, with a call for three million new matches by 2010 (Eisner, 2006). Along similar lines, MENTOR has set the goal of closing the gap between current levels and the 15 million young people who they have estimated could benefit from having a mentor.

What gets measured gets done. The enthusiasm for and growth in initiatives to support mentoring speaks volumes about the faith our society places in one-to-one relationships between vulnerable young people and unrelated but caring adults (Walker, 2005). And with good cause. The success of human services initiatives often rests on the quality of relationships that are forged among participants. By putting relationships at center stage, mentoring programs can deliver this healing in full potency. Moreover, as discussed earlier, a growing body of research provides an encouraging base of evidence for the benefits of high-quality mentoring relationships and for programs and settings that are able to establish and support these types of relationships. Yet, as each new gauntlet is thrown down, programs are pressed to separate quality indicators from growth. The cost of expanding the number of youth served seems to be winning the battle in the competition with expenditures to enrich programs. And, in this climate of heightened pressure to show numbers, mentoring organizations can fall prey to trivializing what is at the very heart of their intervention: caring relationships. A "placeholder mentality," has emerged in some programs—a set of beliefs that the most important program goal is simply to get disadvantaged children off wait lists, that mentor-youth bonds are somewhat interchangeable and, more generally, that somehow if a relationship is formed through a program it does not adhere to the same set of rules as other close relationships (Rhodes, 2002).

It is within this context that the adult volunteer (the

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>
> And, in this climate of heightened pressure to show numbers, mentoring organizations can fall prey to trivializing what is at the very heart of their intervention: caring relationships.

rate limiting factor for growth) has become the "customer" in many mentoring programs. To a growing extent, programs are lowering the bar for volunteers—shifting down from the traditional yearlong commitment and requiring only bimonthly as opposed to weekly meetings. Such changes run counter to research demonstrating the relative benefits of longer, more intensive relationships. In addition, many agencies have taken steps to further minimize volunteer preparation and support, even as research and mentor volunteer surveys underscore their importance (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002; MENTOR, 2006b). Training efforts are uneven and fall largely in the realm of passive approaches (i.e., information packets to mentors) rather than active technical assistance. Case management is also kept to a minimum in many programs, often in the form of perfunctory phone calls or emails every month or so. Taken together, these approaches have reduced the burden that is placed on the agency and volunteer while facilitating shifts in priorities toward volunteer recruitment, intake, and matching.

New approaches to mentoring. As noted previously in our review of research, a plethora of alternative mentoring program models have been introduced in recent years. Perhaps the biggest sea change has been the ascendance of site-based mentoring models, in which interactions between youth and mentors are limited to a particular setting such as school, the workplace, or after-school programs. Indeed, although a rarity 15 years ago, more than half of mentoring programs are now site-based, the vast majority of which are in schools (mostly elementary) (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). In the remainder of this section, we consider school-based mentoring programs in detail. We do so with the goal of illustrating the types of challenges and concerns that are raised by the newer and less proven or intensive approaches to mentoring that are being fueled by current policy more generally.

Although school-based mentoring is commonly thought to be substantially less expensive than community-based models, more recent cost data and observations concerning the administrative complexities of managing relationships across geographically dispersed schools suggest otherwise (e.g., Karcher, Roy-Carlson, Benne, Gil-Hernandez, Allen, & Gomez, 2006a). Nonetheless, this approach has several advantages. Schools are better able to capitalize on the knowledge, refer-

rals, and support of the many adults who are already in the setting, simplifying programs' task of establishing relationships (Jucovy, 2000). Moreover, school-based mentoring programs tend to attract a wider pool of volunteers (particularly high school and college students) who—by virtue of their age, school requirements, jobs, or other circumstances—were less likely to volunteer in community-based programs. And, since the meetings typically occur on school grounds, safety concerns are allayed (Herrera et al., 2000). Yet a downside of many school-based programs is their reduced length and intensity. Because they are linked to the academic calendar, the majority of school-based relationships are suspended during summer months, only a small proportion of which reunite in the fall. This lack of continuity is worrisome, particularly in light of findings suggesting that the benefits of a school-based mentoring program do not persist beyond the duration of the school year (Aseltine et al., 2000). And, even during the school year, relationships tend be less intensive than their community-based counterparts. School-based mentors spend about half as much time with youth as community-based mentors, and the school-based structure tends to constrain the intensity and scope of meetings in ways that community-based relationships do not (Herrera et al., 2000).

The growing dependence on high school and college-aged students for the delivery of school-based mentoring brings its own sets of complications. The unpredictable schedules and transitory nature of this population can undermine continuity. Moreover, because student volunteers are still developing educational credentials themselves, their motivation to mentor often includes fulfilling service-learning requirements or demonstrating community service. Karcher, Nakkula, and Harris (2005) found that mentors who were motivated by self-interest perceived their relationships less positively. Similarly, Rubin and Thorelli (1984) demonstrated how, as the number of such egoistic motives went up, the length of volunteers' participation decreased. Other studies suggest that it is the fulfillment, not the nature, of motivations that matters most (Stukas, Daly, & Clary, 2006). Nonetheless, these associations might help to explain the growing difficulties with volunteer retention, a particularly troubling trend given the adverse effects associated with breakdowns of relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Will Mentoring Become the Next Supermarket Tomato? Reactions to Rhodes and DuBois
Joseph A. Durlak, Loyola University Chicago

Rhodes and DuBois' excellent commentary provides an up-to-date analysis of research and practice on mentoring. In comparing what we know empirically about mentoring to the most recent trends in practice, they raise cautionary flags about how political and financial pressures coupled with strong personal advocacy can undermine the potential value of mentoring programs. In the rush to implement mentoring programs on a much wider scale, exactly the wrong decisions might be made about helping youth in need. In a telling analogy, they liken several current plans for large-scale mentoring programs to the supermarket tomato. Efforts to take a good idea—the juicy, tasty, homegrown tomato—and mass market it for wide consumption (and, of course, for profit) led growers to develop a clearly inferior substitute, the infamous supermarket tomato: the hard, strangely colored piece of fruit that is inferior in nutrition, appearance, and taste to the original. The same thing may happen to the next generation of mentoring programs in the sense that newly established programs may be so poorly conceived and conducted that they will have limited positive impact, and, in some cases, detrimental effects on participating youth.

Unfortunately, the horse might have already left the barn. Once large amounts of money become available, and mentoring organizations seek to increase their reputation and presence in more communities, it is difficult to stop such developments.

Most scientists are not good at public advocacy, and some avoid it like the plague. Often there are strong tensions between what practitioners need from researchers and what is offered. Rhodes and DuBois indicate the dilemma facing mentoring researchers. Current findings "are complex and replete with qualifications and nuances that do not lend themselves easily to political crusades." Yet qualifications and nuances are the last thing that personal advocates of various strategies and those in the policy arena want to hear.

Instead, these individuals prize quick, clear answers offered in simple terms that can be used for action. It can be difficult to satisfy others' desires while remaining true to the principles of evidence-based practice. After all, we do not know precisely why mentoring works, or what circumstances lead to the best results for different participants. Rhodes and DuBois are 100% correct in saying that careful implementation and evaluation of all new programs should be fundamental requirements for all new mentoring programs.

However, researchers (myself included) are often too conservative in generalizing their findings to the real world. In my opinion, Table 1 in Rhodes and DuBois' article could serve very well for a set of forcefully articulated statements about how to run a mentoring program. The following are my immediate reactions that can certainly be improved for mass consumption, but they illustrate the type of guidance that is unlikely to do any harm.

Your mentoring program is more likely to be effective if you:

1. Select mentors who have previous relevant experience in helping. Not everyone is a good mentor;

2. Require a long (at least 12 months) commitment from mentors;

3. Carefully train and support your mentors, and help structure their activities with their mentees;

4. Monitor program implementation. Anticipate that some things will go wrong; they usually do;

5. Involve parents as much as possible; and

6. Remember that if not done carefully, mentoring can harm participating youth! Evaluate your programs, and be ready to change practices as needed.

Researchers have more to say to the real world than they usually realize, but finding the right words and using the right channels to communicate effective messages is not easy. Perhaps Rhodes and DuBois' article can stimulate others to enter the fray. The world does not need any more supermarket tomatoes.

So, in a nutshell—modest findings from the evaluation of an intensive community-based approach to mentoring helped to galvanize a movement and stimulate aggressive growth goals. These goals necessitated that mentoring be delivered more efficiently, which, in turn, changed the intervention to something that bears decreasing resemblance to its inspiration. This is a familiar story in mass production. By way of analogy, we are reminded of the supermarket tomato, which, when bred for cost-efficient and expansive transport, retains notably less of its original nutritional, esthetic, and gustatory qualities. The story of the modern mentoring movement is also evocative of others' attempts to replicate evidence-based human service approaches. A case in point is the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which spurred extensive replication, reduced fidelity, and ultimately less encouraging results (McCoy & Reynolds, 1998). Yet growth and quality are not necessarily incompatible. Bringing an intervention to scale while retaining fidelity is costly and challenging, but it can be done. A key to this will be the improved alignment of research and public policy in the area of youth mentoring

Implications for research. If the youth mentoring movement is to offer optimal and sustained benefit to the young people it seeks to serve, research will need to assume a more central role in the field's further development and growth. Along with the wide range of issues that we already have highlighted in our review of the literature as being in need of clarification, there are several broader concerns that merit highlighting. These include the wealth of opportunities for linkages between basic and applied research that are offered by investigations of mentoring relationships. These studies provide a natural laboratory for the study of a rich array of biological, cognitive, emotional, social, and contextual influences on youth-adult relationships during the course of development. Through careful observation, researchers can gain insight into the processes through which mentors influence developmental outcomes, such as, for example, how models of attachment and social cognition govern the formation and development of intergenerational relationships, and why certain youth are seemingly so profoundly affected by mentoring relationships while others benefit little or even are harmed. These types of questions have been largely overshadowed by important, but more prosaic concerns pertaining to issues such as patterns of contact and relationship duration. Moving beyond these first-generation questions—in essence, getting to the heart and soul of the change process—is critical to advancing a more scientifically informed and practically applicable understanding of youth development and resilience. Clearly, the direction we are describing fits well with recent initiatives of the National Institutes of Health to support translational research that links basic and applied areas of inquiry.

With regard to mentoring in programs and organizations, there clearly is a need for careful evaluations of the full range of innovative new approaches (Rhodes & DuBois, 2004). These will be critically important to position policymakers and practitioners to make decisions concerning optimal dosage and duration as well as a range of other concerns. The need for more empirically informed strategies for improving volunteer retention is illustrative in this regard. High rates of volunteer attrition continue to represent a major drain on staff and financial resources in mentoring program. Despite considerable program investments into mentor recruitment, matching, training, and supervision, as many as 50% of relationships terminate prematurely (Rhodes, 2002). The growing body of research on volunteer and employee retention (e.g., Branhan, 2006; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999; Stukas et al., 2006) as well as qualitative inquiry into the factors underlying mentor attrition (Spencer, 2006) should be brought to bear on this issue.

There is also a need for greater involvement of researchers in all phases of the process of designing, piloting, implementing, evaluating, and disseminating interventions in the area of youth mentoring (DuBois et al., in press). To date, the role of research has been predominantly to evaluate programs once they have been developed, often only after they have been disseminated

> More proactive and sustained integration of research at all stages will be pivotal for developing more scientifically informed and effective programs and for ensuring that such programs are disseminated with efficiency and high fidelity.

The Redefinition of Quality as Quantity
Edward Seidman, William T. Grant Foundation and New York University

In "Understanding and Facilitating the Youth Mentoring Movement," Jean Rhodes and David DuBois provide us with a well-balanced integration of contemporary research findings, insights from their experiences on the ground, and an insightful, critical analysis of mentoring research and practice. Moreover, as they suggest, mentoring research and practice have gotten caught up in a rising tide of popularity and politics. During this process, the quality and essence of mentoring seem to have moved further into the shadows. Or, stated otherwise, it seems as if quality has been redefined as quantity.

In what follows, I briefly address three questions. First, why does this process of redefinition occur? Second, is this process of redefinition unique to the mentoring arena? Third, is there an antidote?

As the authors point out, what ultimately unfolds is, in part, a function of the definition of the "problem" and/or solution. Mentoring was seen as a response to individual needs and problems. Thus, individualism is a primary and implicit premise of mentoring and it leads to a focus on individual-level causes and outcomes (Seidman & Rappaport, 1986). Another key, related premise that guides the Western, and particularly the American, mindset is pragmatism and rationality. By necessity, this premise leads us to reduce complex issues to simpler forms. A logical exemplar of the need to be pragmatic and rational has often led us to a concern with cost-effectiveness. To evaluate cost-effectiveness, a metric is needed. In many areas of human and social services, this has often led us to individual-level outcomes or "head counts," that is, the number of individuals served when settings are the purported level of analysis. Behind this idea is often the appealing notion that "more is better."

Quality, on the other hand, flies in the face of these premises. Quality is complex, can rarely be captured by individualism and pragmatism/rationality, and, not surprisingly, is difficult to quantify without doing a disservice to its essence. Quality can lead us to focus on setting-level practices and interactions as the outcomes of interest, in contrast to a narrow focus on quantity. However, as mentoring has come to be seen as a viable solution to problem youth and has become increasingly popular politically, the implicit premises of individualism, pragmatism, and rationality have helped transform an emphasis on quality to one of quantity.

We have borne witness to a similar process in many other areas. Take, for example, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation and its trickle-down consequences for policy and practice at lower levels. Many, though not all, of the foundational assumptions of the legislation represent good intentions as well as the complexity and importance of the underlying issues. Yet, in practice, individualism, pragmatism, and rationality, along with the premise of a single standard of comparison by which to array and rank people, converge to focus on standardized achievement score outcomes. And as is well known, in classrooms and schools, these standards often result in teachers "teaching to the test." Supporting and stimulating youth to become life-long, autonomous problem-solvers seems far removed from the day-to-day realities of NCLB. One can only wonder how the salient daily teacher-student interactions and instructional and feedback practices have been weakened. Within these types of daily transactions and experiences lie the ingredients of a high-quality educational setting.

When we turn to after-school programs, we again see the tension between quality and quantity. Too often, quantity, whether in terms of the number of youth seen in a program or youths' average gain on standardized achievement tests, ends up as the metrics of choice. And, once again, the focus on the quality of good programs—that is, daily staff practices and staff-youth and youth-youth interactions—is overshadowed by the need to demonstrate that more youth were served and/or standardized achievement test scores were increased. Thus, the ascendance of quantity over quality indices is not unique to mentoring, but common to many areas.

Is there an antidote for this quandary? Are quantity and quality antithetical to each other? Clearly, Rhodes and DuBois do not believe that they are—"growth and quality are not necessarily incompatible." To the contrary, I'd speculate that they are probably orthogonal to each other. Does this mean they are of equal importance? Or, is quality a necessary, but not sufficient condition? Here, I return to the Rhodes and DuBois schema to say that it probably depends on the level of analysis. At the level of the dyad, quality is probably both necessary and sufficient. On the other hand, at the level of programs and policies, quality is necessary, but not sufficient. In addition to quality, for example, effective programs also require the financial resources and staff capacity to provide high-quality interactions for youth. (Of course, all of these speculations need to

be subjected to empirical verification.)

Without better measurement of quality at every level—dyad, program, and policy—we will never have the opportunity to bring quality out of the shadows and into the light. And as Rhodes & DuBois remind us, *what gets measured gets done*. As researchers, the measurement of quality at every level is our greatest challenge. Practitioners, better than anyone, know how central quality is. However, the policy arena is less patient and attuned to the complexity of quality; quality is difficult to implement. With high-quality tools to measure quality that are easy to use and understand, we stand a better chance of influencing policymakers and turning the tide.

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widely. More proactive and sustained integration of research at all stages will be pivotal for developing more scientifically informed and effective programs and for ensuring that such programs are disseminated with efficiency and high fidelity. University-community agency partnerships are a particularly promising mechanism for achieving these goals.

Implications for policy. As the preceding discussion makes clear, policies that demand greater adherence to evidence-based practice and the use of rigorous evaluations are needed to ensure quality receives as much attention as does quantity as the practice of youth mentoring continues to expand. Models of successful program replication can help guide such growth. Most replicated programs do not retain the original effectiveness, but there are a few examples, including two that involve mentoring components: the Nurse-Family Partnership (Olds, 2006) and the Across Ages Mentoring Program (Taylor, LoSciuto, & Porcellini, 2005). These programs have successfully identified the critical elements of the program, assessed the new "market," and provided ongoing supervision and monitoring to ensure that the new programs retained all the critical components (see Racine, 2004). So, even as Across Ages expanded to over 30 sites in 17 states, it continues to boast relatively low volunteer attrition, match durations that greatly exceed national averages, and encouraging behavioral, academic, and psychosocial outcomes.

To facilitate replication, new mentoring initiatives should have well-developed evaluation systems in place *prior to* implementation. This has not been the case to date. There are encouraging signs of change, however. These include the Mentoring Initiative for System Involved Youth, sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This initiative will be launched in only four demonstration sites and rigorously evaluated within a research-oriented framework (OJJDP, 2006), a marked contrast to its predecessor, the Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP). Several large-scale random-assignment evaluations of school-based mentoring are also underway that promise to shed important light on this program model. Funding that extends these evaluations and leverages the initial investment through secondary analysis could further illuminate mentoring processes and outcomes.

A deeper understanding of mentoring relationships can, in turn, be exported to other contexts of youth development. Indeed, caring adult-youth relationships have never been the sole province of mentoring programs. After-school programs, summer camps, competitive sports teams, church youth groups, and other settings represent rich contexts for the formation of strong intergenerational ties (Foster-Bey, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006). Adults in these settings are often afforded ongoing opportunities to engage youth in the sorts of informal conversations and enjoyable activities that can give rise to close bonds (Rhodes, 2004). Developing and evaluating strategies that facilitate skillful, intentional mentoring and determining how to encourage youth to recruit adults represent promising new directions for policy with potentially far-reaching implications (Clary & Rhodes, 2006; Larson, in press; Scales, 2006; Smith & Smoll, 2002). Other youth come in contact with adults through publicly funded service systems, such

as welfare, juvenile justice, foster care, housing, and teen-parenting programs. With more deliberate planning, such systems could be made more responsive to the relational needs of vulnerable groups. Policies that support whole-child and family approaches, and encourage linkages among youth programs, can contribute to more a wider, more comprehensive system of support (Ripple & Zigler, 2003).

Policymakers, advocacy organizations, and funders have a critically important role to play in holding all youth-serving programs, organizations, and institutions to a high standard in their efforts to make high-quality mentoring relationships available to young people (MENTOR, 2006c). A shared vision of excellence, along with a commitment to scientifically informed guidance and support, will be needed to achieve this goal and thus ensure that advances in the practice of mentoring truly improve the lives of our nation's youth.

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