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Training Mentors for Faith-Based Mentoring

Richard C. Henriksen, Jr., Danielle F. Marks, and Justyn D. Smith

Henriksen, Richard C., Jr., is a professor of counselor education at Sam Houston State University. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor and a National Certified Counselor with research interests that include multicultural counseling, the multiple heritage population, religious and spiritual issues in counseling, counseling student development, and adult and adolescent substance use.

Marks, Danielle F., is a doctoral fellow in counselor education at Sam Houston State University and received her Master's of Education in Counseling and Mental Health Services and Master's in Philosophy of Education in Professional Counseling from the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include counseling families formed through adoption, Adlerian theory, and multicultural counseling.

Smith, Justyn D., is a doctoral fellow in counselor education at Sam Houston State University and received his Master's of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Wright State University. His research interests include multicultural training and ethical issues in counseling, and exploring factors such as school, family, and sociocultural aspects that affect the African American male.

Abstract

Mentoring is the process of one person with more experience helping another person reach goals. In recent years, efforts to help children who are both in the criminal justice system and Alternative Behavior Units (ABU) in public schools have moved to using mentoring programs to help them change their current paths in life. The purpose of this manuscript is to describe a faith-based mentor training program that was developed to support the implementation of a faith-based mentoring program. The program was for students in grades two through eight who were having problems both in school and out of school resulting in poor academic and behavioral performance. All mentors volunteered through the outreach efforts of a local Christian church. The mentor training process and some outcomes of the training program are presented. Implications of the training and the need for additional research are presented.

Keywords: mentoring, education, discipline, faith-based programs

According to researchers (DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Little, Kearney, & Britner, 2010; Weiler et al., 2015), the support of youth mentoring programs is strong across the United States, as evidenced by the large number of programs that have been implemented. These researchers noted that the support of such programs is based on a belief that to obtain positive developmental outcomes, youth need supportive and consistent relationships with non-parental adults. Zand et al. (2009) and La Valle (2015) indicated that though this belief in mentoring programs has remained consistent across time, the research in this area has struggled to keep up with the claims of efficacy and are not focused on mentor training. The programs that are researched are often large school-based programs (Hanlon, Simon, O'Grady, Carswell, & Callaman, 2009), urban programs (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009; Hall, 2015), and midsized rural school-based programs (school districts under 5,000 students; Bohannon & Bohannon, 2015), with the emphasis being placed on the mentees and not the training of the mentors. The purpose of this manuscript is to describe a faith-based mentor training program where mentors mentor youth in a combined school and faith-based environment in a mid-sized rural school district in Texas. The authors developed, implemented, and provided the mentor training but were not involved in the development and implementation of the mentoring program.

Mentoring Described and Defined

Klinge (2015) described mentoring as "a process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (the mentee or protégé) in the development of her or his own ideas, learning, and personal/professional competence" (p. 160). Hall (2015) pointed out that "depending on the issues and concerns for their target population, mentoring programs might specialize in anything from scholastic improvement, social skills development or rites of passage to preparation for child rearing, vocational and career training, or physical education" (p. 39). Additionally, Bohannon and Bohannon (2015) described mentoring "as a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) who share similar experiences based upon mutual trust and respect…" (p. 31). These researchers went on to point out that "the role of the mentor is to guide and help mentees to choose the right direction and develop solutions to issues they might face" (p. 31).

The above descriptions suggest that mentoring is a complex relationship between two or more individuals with the goal of growth for both the mentor and mentee in a variety of areas. McLaughlin (2010) and Benishek, Bieschke, Park, and Slattery (2004) indicated that there is no consensus as to what mentoring is or how it is defined. It is important to note that there is much more to understanding what a mentor is then merely someone having experience and trust. A mentor has been defined as "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher" (Mentor, n.d., para. 1). Additionally, Merriam-Webster (2015) defined a mentor as "someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person" (para. 1). The result of looking at these many other definitions of mentoring led us to one basic definition that we used for this project: *mentors support and help those with less experience in life, in this case elementary and middle school students, but they do not do for the mentee what the mentee can learn to do for herself or himself.*

Faith-Based Mentoring and the Opt-In Program

Mentoring has a potentially important role to play in the emotional and spiritual development of today's youth. (Rhodes & Chan, 2008)

Faith-Based Mentoring

Mentoring is discussed and defined from many different perspectives for many different populations. Rhodes and Chan (2008) pointed out that there has been great growth in the development of faith-based mentoring programs. Fulop (2003) developed a comprehensive outline of what constitutes a faith-based mentoring program that includes the following characteristics:

- Faith-based mentoring programs are direct activities of a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple or are otherwise anchored in a faith-based institution.

- Many faith-based mentoring programs are housed in the faith-based institution itself just like those in schools and other community settings. Faith-based mentoring programs include a commitment to service and civic-engagement.

   This commitment to service and social transformation, as well as to personal spiritual growth, is an explicit component of many faith institutions. Often the community and social services of these faith communities is nonsectarian; in many faith-based mentoring programs, community service is a significant point of interaction between the mentor and youth. (Fulop, 2003, p. 2)

- Faith-based mentoring programs typically move beyond social service through mentoring to advocating for long-term social change through the mentoring process.

- The creation of faith-based mentoring programs involves components of teaching and modeling that are based in the religious practices of the sponsoring organization. Fulop (2003) pointed out that

   faith-based mentoring offers a framework for teaching and modeling values and life skills to youth. In this area, the faith-based mentoring programs often make intentional choices as to the religiosity of the teaching and modeling. While some faith-based mentoring programs incorporate religious tenets and teachings into their mentor-youth relationships, other mentoring programs are largely nonsectarian, relying on the larger principles related to values and life skills. (p. 2)

Though researchers and practitioners alike have struggled to arrive at a consistent definition of faith-based mentoring, for the purposes of this article we offer the following definition of faith-based mentoring: *The practice of an individual volunteering his or her time, through an organized religious group (e.g., Christian church, Muslim mosque, Jewish synagogue), to build a relationship with a child to promote that child's spiritual, academic, and holistic growth.* With this definition in mind we recognize that there is often a larger focus on Christian mentoring organizations, yet our definition of faith-based mentoring acknowledges that Christianity is not the only organized religion that is engaged in active volunteerism and mentoring.

Faith-Based Volunteering and the Opt-In Program

Rhodes and Chan (2008) pointed out that religious organizations provided half of all volunteering efforts and that 60% of those involved in religious organizations participate in volunteer opportunities. Many involved in religious volunteer activities are engaged in mentoring programs. One well-known faith-based formal mentoring organization in the United States is the Amachi project (Rhodes & Chan, 2008). Through the Amachi project, connections between the faith-based community and the secular community are developed for the benefit of children seeking help who have incarcerated parents and are seeking opportunities to improve their lot in life. The program's emphasis is on helping those children learn coping skills that would lead them to making good life choices and avoid following in a similar path as their parents and/or guardians. The creators of the Amachi project explained that

> in the communities where these children live, the church is often the most important remaining institution, and many of those churches have been a strong support for the communities and a source of volunteers who are forces for positive change. (Jucovy, 2003, p. 3)

Additionally, Jucovy (2003) explained that the natural altruism of those involved in the volunteering aspect of church life makes the shift from other forms of volunteering to helping children in need of guidance, a natural one. This idea is further supported by the fact that 43% of the volunteers in the United States who are engaged in mentoring relationships do so through a religious organization (Foster-Bey, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006).

There are many religious groups who engage in mentoring practices from a wide variety of faiths. Given that the mentors involved in the training that is the focus of this paper are members of the Opt-In Program, which was developed by members of an East Texas church who describe the congregation as a Christ-centered Baptist church, this paper will specifically focus on faith-based mentor training from the perspective of secular trainers and Christian mentors. The authors were involved in developing the mentor training program while at the same time the Opt-In Program was being developed. We acted as consultants to the directors of the mentoring program but were not actively involved in its development. Additionally, it is important to mention that the Opt-In Program was developed to provide mentoring opportunities for children who are experiencing both academic problems and disciplinary problems in the school and community. Therefore, in addition to the faith-based approach to the mentor training program, a large focus will also be on the issues that arise in the mentoring relationship regarding academic troubles and disciplinary issues at school and in the community.

The Opt-In Program

The Opt-In program is based on the belief of the host church that mentoring, from a Christ-centered perspective, could lead students with academic and behavioral problems to make better choices. In a rural East Texas community, the Opt-In mentoring program was developed with its focus on children in an Alternative Behavior Unit (ABU) or who were otherwise identified as having academic and/or disciplinary problems themselves rather than having parents in the criminal justice system (as in the Amachi project). In a personal communication with one of the directors of the Opt-In program, we were able to gather the following description and related information (L. Beassie,

personal communication, January 29, 2015). According to Mr. Beassie, while there are a number of programs in the community that encourage mentoring in the public schools, no other program provides a "whole person" approach whereby there is spiritual development, academic enrichment, and counseling to help navigate through the challenges of raising children and engaging life. Those involved in the Opt-In program believe that Christ requires only one thing – Accept Him as Lord and Savior. In other words, choosing the "Option" for Christ.

Program design. The genesis of the program was a church-sponsored Sunday afternoon gathering for neighborhood children using a "Back Yard Bible Club" model common in the Southern Baptist and other protestant denominations. While exploring options, the directors began to regularly visit and spend time with the children at a local intermediate school, all of whom were in the Alternative Behavior Unit (ABU). The ABU is a program designed to provide a controlled, disciplined environment for learning for those students who have behavioral problems in the schools and who have violated local laws in the communities where they live. Students are assigned to these programs for 15 to 90 days, depending on the severity of the problem that resulted in the referral. The directors required mentors to meet with their children twice a month, in addition to maintaining open lines of communication via text message and e-mail during the weeks that they did not meet. The goal of the Opt-In program was for the mentor to be a friend that demonstrated the love of Christ to the child. Based on the needs of the children in the program and their families, the directors had the option to refer them to family counseling and/or weekly tutoring.

Selection of mentors and mentees. The directors of the program asked pastors and community partners to recommend children in need of mentoring and also adults whom they deemed to be capable and appropriate for the role of mentors. Mentors were asked to fill out a detailed application, have an interview, complete a background check, and agree to serve as a mentor for at least one year. Those that demonstrated continued commitment were selected and had an initial meeting with the directors, the child, and the child's parent. Mentors were expected to have a relationship with Christ, attend training meetings, participate in summer camp, and meet with their assigned child at least every other week. Mentors were trained to only meet with their child in the presence of another mentor and/or the child's parent (although the former is preferred). After the completion of the selection process, nine mentors were identified and each agreed to be a mentor for one year. The mentors all identified as White and Christian, ranging in age from 18 to 65 years old. There were seven women and two men, and all were in college or had a college degree. All had either part-time or full-time jobs except one who volunteered in the community.

The initial group of mentees were selected from those students that attended a Sunday afternoon program at the sponsoring church or that met the program director in the Alternative Behavioral Unit (ABU) also known as the ABU room at the intermediate school. The program directors reached out to the parents and requested a meeting to describe the Opt-In program and to begin the admissions process. From this group, seven children were enrolled who also participated in a summer camp to kick off the program. The mentees were in second through sixth grades and were all Black. They ranged in age from seven to 13 years old, and all were identified as having low socioeconomic status. All mentees were identified as having academic difficulties. There

was one girl and six boys. Four children were identified as Christian, and three had no identified religious background.

Though the population of the Opt-In program is not consistent with the overall Amachi project described earlier, the program goals and purpose are parallel with their overall goals. The Opt-In program provides a *whole family* approach, whereby, mentoring was focused on spiritual development and character development, along with academic enrichment provided by tutors in a university teacher education program. Additionally, counseling was provided to the mentees and their families though a cooperative agreement with a local university counselor training program that also sought to help parents navigate through the challenges of raising children and engaging in life.

When contemplating the development of a faith-based mentoring program, it can be helpful to note how the mentoring relationship can influence the religious practices of both individuals. Rhodes and Chan (2008) noted that,

> Mentoring relationships forged through religious organizations could offer some advantages in adolescents' search for meaning, such as reconciliation of their own and their parents' belief systems. Particularly in the light of the associations between religious involvement and positive youth outcomes, mentoring relationships that provide a potential for spiritual and religious development of mentees could serve a protective role. (p. 87)

With that in mind, the Opt-In program was used to help both mentors and mentees forge relationships that go beyond the niceties of friendship toward the development of relationships that will assist the youth in the creation of ways of being that could reduce the likelihood of continued behaviors resulting in ABU placements. Mentor training focused on how to develop one-on-one relationships in cross cultural dyads and was the focus of the training activities.

Mentor Trainers

Mentoring is a process of one more experienced person(s) helping another person(s) grow and develop. To that end, the developers of this mentor training program served as both mentors and trainers to the Opt-In program mentors. The first author was a professor of counselor education for 16 years and a professional counselor for more than 20 years. He has worked with adolescents and children for over 25 years during which he has developed and implemented many mentoring programs in Texas, Oklahoma, and Illinois. He has also co-authored several articles on spirituality in counseling. The second author served as a mentor and trainer for this program and is currently a doctoral student completing her first year of courses. She is currently a Licensed Professional Counselor Intern and is gaining experience as both a counselor with adolescents and as a trainer. The third author is also a doctoral student completing his first year of courses and served as a mentor and trainer for the Opt-In program. He is currently a Licensed Professional Counselor Intern and is gaining experience as a counselor and trainer.

Counselors and Mentors: The Connection

The ethical principles required to be an effective mentor and an effective counselor overlap, though the role of a mentor and the role of a counselor are different (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2009).

ACA (2014) requires that all professional counselors who are members of ACA operate under the ethical principles of autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity. Rhodes et al. (2009) explained that to be an effective youth mentor, the mentor must practice fidelity, responsibility, beneficence, nonmaleficence, integrity, justice, and respect the rights and dignity of the mentees. In comparing the suggested ethical guidelines for both mentors and counselors, it is clear that there is a significant overlap in the responsibilities and expected behavior of both counselors and mentors. The differences between counseling and mentoring appear when looking at the format of each relationship. In a counseling relationship, there is often an exchange of money for services, while youth mentoring is often provided pro bono through religious or other service organizations (ACA, 2014; Rhodes & Chan, 2008). Additionally, while both relationships require firm boundaries, there are both legal and ethical lines that a counselor cannot cross that a mentor can. As Rhodes et al. (2009) explained, "Although youth mentoring shares many of the conventions of more professionalized helping relationships, the informal and voluntary nature of this endeavor releases it from some of the more rigid proscriptions that govern such ties" (p. 456). Though the mentoring relationship is not as significantly impacted by the legal and ethical boundaries that bind the hands of counselors, the ethical responsibilities and the expectation of client/mentee advocacy at the core of both counseling and mentoring suggest that counselors would make impactful and effective mentor trainers.

Professional counselors and mentors have many similarities, and there is a resemblance in the basic skills to operate in either role. As counselors, the basic skills and qualities are active listening, effective communication, trustworthiness, open-mindedness, and being non-judgmental (Cormier & Hackney, 2012). As mentors, the basic skills are effective communication, attentive listening, the ability to develop trust, and confidentiality (Cleaver, 2016). Both roles require awareness of personal body language and awareness of the mentor or client to help with building rapport and helping to empathize (Cleaver, 2016; Cormier & Hackney, 2012). Also, counselors work under ethical guidelines, such as the *ACA Code of Ethics*, holding them to various standards such as having multicultural competence. According to ACA (2014), multicultural competence is defined as "counselors' cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge are applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups" (p. 20). The ethical guidelines expected for counselors to operate under and the similarities between the basic necessary skills demonstrate the reasoning for the appropriateness for counselors to train mentors. The connection between counseling and mentoring allowed for the creation of a bridge between the two to be built, resulting in the appropriate and effective mentor training.

Opt-In Mentor Training Program

The mentorship training program was created to prepare a group of mentors, who possessed no prior mentoring experience, from a faith-based environment for the multiple roles of a mentor. The Opt-In program directors, a husband and wife team from the church that sponsored the Opt-In program and who both have a background of working with families in the community, developed the overall mentoring program and

emphasized the role of faith in the mentoring process. They also instructed the mentors on issues of ethics and the law as they related to working with minors.

The purpose of the mentor training was to teach the mentors the basic concepts of the mentoring process, the importance of unconditional acceptance and support of the mentees, the importance of acknowledging and addressing issues of diversity, and also to prepare the mentors for challenges that may arise during the mentoring relationship. Integrating the role of faith from a Christian perspective into the mentoring role was also discussed during the training activities, with much of that discussion being led by the Opt-In program directors and additional related information provided by the trainers. The Opt-In mentorship training program was designed to be an interactive training experience giving participants real world training that they could use right away. The group of mentors was asked to role-play, respond to questions, engage in dyadic activities, and complete worksheets that served to educate and support their roles as mentors.

Training Components

The training incorporated video and didactic instruction focused on learning to become a mentor. Initially, participants addressed what it means to be a mentor through the viewpoint of both the mentee and the mentor. Topics addressed included why children may need mentors, the stages in the mentoring relationship, and the practice of effective mentoring. Participants engaged in a discussion about the different roles and expectations of a mentor including legal issues such as the reporting of child abuse. Another important topic discussed was ethical principles in mentoring, as defined by Rhodes et al. (2009). After a thorough investigation of the principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, fidelity, responsibility, integrity, and justice, in regard to the mentoring relationship, the group engaged in role-plays about difficult situations that may arise and the importance of active listening in the mentoring relationship and, finally, ways to ethically problem solve.

Training Process and Focus

A large portion of the mentor training focused on how to accept differences among people and how to adopt a position of inclusiveness involving diverse ways of communicating and living life. However, there was a challenge to this process that is endemic to the mixing of the secular and the religious.

The focus of mentor training is often surrounded around the idea of teaching mentors to face several of life's many challenges that include "dealing with low-income children and their families and the need for objectivity and a nonjudgmental demeanor" (Goode & Smith, 2005, p. 29). However, the faith-based community members brought with them the need to share their religious practices and beliefs rather than to maintain a focus solely on the mentoring relationship. As Rhodes and Chan (2008) pointed out, proselytizing can render the mentoring relationship ineffective in the long run. They also noted the importance of mentors understanding developmental processes of spiritual identity development and how they can help to avoid proselytizing. This interaction informed us of the need to address this topic during ongoing training activities.

Overall, the training of mentors needed to target learning how to develop relationships with their mentees focused on helping the mentees learn to be open and honest with the mentors. The training process provided the mentors and the Opt-In

program directors with a basic understanding of mentoring, the stages of mentoring, the joys and challenges of mentoring, and diversity issues in mentoring and provided opportunities to practice the basic skills of communication and mentoring.

Training Steps

Training was conducted on three Saturdays for 3 hours each session. The mentors had also attended a workshop on legal and ethical issues prior to the start of the mentor training program. To aid other counselors in the replication of this training process, we summarized the training activities we provided in the following steps:

Step 1: Literature review. The trainers first searched the available literature on mentoring and accumulated literature that was used in the development of the faith-based mentor training program with an emphasis on mentees with behavioral problems and in rural school districts. The primary focus was on the training and preparation of faith-based mentors for mentoring with diverse populations given that all of the mentors where White and all of the mentees were Black. The literature review also included legal and ethical issues that impacted faith-based mentoring initiatives. All of the information gathered was reviewed, summarized, and presented to the mentors so that they would have a research supported foundation for the development of their mentoring skills.

Step 2: Developing the training. The overall mentor training program was developed using best practices for mentoring in general and for faith-based programs specifically. The training was interactive and the trainers encouraged full engagement and participation of all mentors. Steinert and Snell (1999) explained that, "the value of interactive lecturing rests on the premise that active participation and involvement is a prerequisite for learning beyond the recall of facts, and that students must be attentive and motivated in order for learning to occur" (p. 37). The provided training was based on this premise and therefore included many interactive pieces. Through the development and implementation of interactive training activities, the mentors gained new knowledge and experience to aid in their interactions with their mentees.

While most faith-based volunteers are used to volunteering in a wide variety of capacities, they are typically not used to mentoring, especially with children from culturally different backgrounds who are or have been in trouble with the school or legal system. Active learning activities help to bridge that knowledge and skills gap (Hamilton et al., 2006). Depending on the age of the mentee, different activities can be used to engage the mentee in an interactive dialogue. An example of one of these activities was how to learn about a topic of interest to the mentee and how to engage in a writing or drawing activity to create a story about the topic. Discovering topics of interest opens up the possibility for the discovery of shared interests, and engaging in creative activities can help to enhance the mentoring relationship while bridging a cultural gap.

Step 3: Conducting the training. The training was conducted for a team of nine mentors and two program directors at a small church in rural Texas. Though the training had didactic and video components, the majority of the training was interactive and required active participation from the mentors attending the training. This gave them all the experience of developing relationships with culturally diverse individuals. A strong emphasis was placed on active participation, considering the fact that educational research suggests that individuals learn more when engaged in interactive learning activities than in passive activities such as didactic lecture (Delialioğlu, 2012; Steinert &

Snell, 1999). Participant engagement is a crucial part of effective learning in multiple instructional settings, and it is the instructor's responsibility to provide the active learning atmosphere that reinforces participants' engagement and fosters success (Delialioğlu, 2012). The following is a short description of the overall training activities:

- We began with an activity focused on the mentors learning about each other, rather than why they were there. The activity was also used by the mentors to begin learning about their mentees. While participating in this activity, the instructor encouraged the mentors to discuss aspects of themselves (e.g., hopes and dreams, hobbies) that would help them to connect to their mentees, rather than list credentials, as is common in many introduction-style activities.

- Using a YouTube video that highlighted an individual's experience as both a mentor and a mentee, we discussed what mentoring is and why it is important. Also, we discussed why each of the mentors needed a mentor at some point in their lives and how they developed the relationships they had with their mentors. We encouraged each mentor to share his or her thoughts during this discussion and informed them all that we were willing to serve as their mentors if they so desired.

- We discussed with the mentors why they believe mentees might need and want a mentor, the characteristics a mentee would want from a mentor, and how each of the mentors could meet those characteristics. Again, we encouraged all mentors to participate in the discussion.

- Using additional YouTube videos, we provided basic knowledge of the role of a mentor, foundations of a mentoring relationship, and mentoring practices.

- Following the presentation of the basic knowledge needed for the development of mentoring skills, we had the mentors practice active listening skills in dyads. They learned how to ask questions, probe, and make basic responses to the mentees. This provided an active opportunity for the mentors to have fun while learning basic communication skills.

- Mentors learned the stages of the mentoring relationship and the pitfalls that may be encountered during the mentoring process. The mentors participated in a role-play of a difficult mentor-mentee situation that may arise, and we had the group discuss how to handle difficult situations ethically and appropriately. This was followed by a conversation on confidentiality that included when and how to break confidentiality.

- The mentors discussed cultural diversity and cultural biases and how they could negatively affect the mentoring relationship. Using the *Check Your Biases Worksheet*, the mentors explored their individual biases and learned how to work through them. The *Check Your Biases Worksheet* was created by the mentor trainers (authors) to allow the mentors to begin to explore their biases and how these biases influence the mentor-mentee relationship. To complete the worksheet, the mentors were required to describe their biases, identify how these biases could impact the mentor-mentee relationship, and identify how they could become more aware of the role biases play in a mentor-mentee relationship.

- The trainers suggested activities that the mentors could use with their mentees and practiced conversation starters and activities with the mentors. An example that was provided was called the "cars" activity. In this example, a common interest between the mentor and mentee was cars. The mentor brought car magazines to the meeting and together the mentor and mentee created a story using photographs from the magazines. This activity focused on using a common interest to build rapport between the mentor and mentee.

- Lastly, we discussed what a mentor commitment entails and wrapped up the entire training through summarization of the key components of the training and answering questions. Participants then completed a short evaluation of the training.

Step 4: Evaluating the training. A questionnaire was developed based on the topics covered in the training to determine the effectiveness of the training (see Appendix). The questionnaire allowed all participants to remain anonymous and the opportunity to provide feedback for future mentor training sessions. Recommendations from the mentees included the desire for further training on issues of diversity, how to interact with parents and families, how to deal with instances of aggression, and more suggestions for activities to engage in with the mentee. The majority of the mentors also pointed out that they believed the role-plays and the dyadic exercises were the most effective training mechanisms, so future trainings will incorporate more of these training methods.

Step 5: Follow-up training. Because the mentoring relationship is an ongoing process, continued training is necessary to help the mentors continue their development and maturity as mentors (Miller, Barnes, Miller, & McKinnon, 2013). We scheduled a follow-up training session based on the feedback from the evaluation of each training session and the current needs of the program and mentees after each phase of the mentoring program was completed. Based on the population of the mentees, we determined that the follow-up training required a more thorough exploration of mentors' personal biases and awareness of cultural differences. This second phase of training also focused on the development of the mentor-mentee relationship and the challenges that have arisen since the beginning stages of the current relationships. Issues of discipline and ethics were also addressed.

Training Evaluation

Mentors were given evaluations at the end of each training session to provide feedback as to the content of each session, its relevance to their mentoring activities, and as an opportunity to give feedback regarding their ongoing training needs. The training evaluation form included questions focused on the application of knowledge and skills learned, their beliefs about mentor responsibilities, and thoughts about how diversity was covered during the training sessions. The mentors reported that they learned to listen to mentees more, to be more open to the different viewpoints of their mentees, and that they should not operate as parental figures in the mentor/mentee relationship. Also, the mentors reported realizing that their responsibilities included helping their mentees improve academically and behaviorally, guiding their mentee with positive influences,

being a voice of encouragement, providing consistent interactions, and being a friend. The following words from one of the mentors reflected the sentiments of the group when that mentor wrote about learning,

> Not to judge or give advice to [a] mentee. To support mentee by being present and showing that you care. To guide mentee with positive influences and expose them to a higher way of thinking and culture. To keep them feeling safe at all times and respect personal boundaries. Let them see the light of God within you.

In regards to the area of diversity, the mentors reported learning new meanings and definitions to define diversity and they learned about the term color-blind and its positive and negative characteristics. They also reported having enjoyed hearing the "real" about diversity or, in other words, hearing real life stories of how diversity affects the lives of each of us. Finally, the mentors reported believing that the area of diversity was covered in an encouraging way that allowed each of them to be their real selves and share their viewpoints openly and honestly.

We also gained feedback from mentors about what they viewed as most valuable, what they viewed as least valuable, and areas they wanted to cover in future trainings. The mentors reported finding value in every area covered and every activity utilized during each training. Key ideas we learned from the mentors included: (a) the mentors valuing interactive activities, role plays, and (b) discussions about race and culture. The following words illustrate one of the lessons the mentors talked about learning:

> The skit that they did with two people interacting and going through possible situations that we may encounter of how the kid's may respond. It helped getting ideas of what to say in certain situations or behaviors that the kid's come in with.

Overall, the trainers were able to determine that the mentors appreciated the open and honest discussion of race and culture, expressed a desire to continue to be active during training sessions, and valued the time spent as a group during training. Also, for the fourth training in the future, the mentors voiced the opinion that they would like to cover areas related to talking with parents, how to appropriately involve the parents, and how to evolve the mentor relationship as the mentee grows.

Conclusion and Implications for Counselors

Combining counseling, mentoring, and faith can be challenging, but when done using appropriate research and best practices, the outcome can be very impactful. Many of the best practices in mentoring mirrored those in counseling, such as, treating the mentors with respect, doing no harm, respecting diversity, and honoring commitments. These universal goals apply to both the counseling profession and the mentoring relationship. It was our goal to educate the mentors on these best practices so that they would be prepared for what has the potential to be both a challenging and rewarding relationship with a mentee. Miller et al. (2013) explained that a successful mentoring program has three main components,

> First, the frequency of meeting between matched pairs of mentees and mentors was positively correlated with positive outcomes. Second, the duration of mentoring relationships was also positively correlated with youth success. Last,

the formal training (and continued training) of mentors was observed as indicative of program performance and goal realization. (p. 452)

Each of these aspects of a successful mentoring program was addressed throughout the training. Attention was also put on the importance of bi-weekly meetings, for a minimum of one hour, between the mentors and the mentees and multiple follow-up trainings, and continued contact with the program directors was planned and implemented

Implementing a training program that respected the faith-based goals of the program, while stressing best mentoring practices, required diligent research and commitment. The Opt-In mentor training program provided mentors with the opportunity to gain training and experience for helping young people that might not otherwise have been possible. Each mentor learned how to help young people and the importance of avoiding negative interactions that could have resulted in the breaking of the mentor/mentee relationship.

There is a need for more research that is focused on faith-based mentoring. For example, one limitation of this project was that all of the mentees were Black. Research that looks at the effectiveness of faith-based mentoring across different racial and cultural groups could lead to the identification of new best practices for mentoring our youth. Additionally, because all of the mentors were White, research that included a diverse population of mentors could lead to new methods for training mentors in cross cultural and faith-based and secular integrated mentoring programs. This project was also limited to children with academic and behavioral difficulties and to mentors in college or with college educations. Research that is focused on understanding the mentoring process from different cultural group perspectives could also lead to new mentor training practices.

One best practice that appeared from this project was the use of three diverse trainers to prepare the mentors for their mentoring responsibilities. While all three of the mentor trainers were doctoral-level trained, they had diverse backgrounds in age (24, 25, 63), gender (1 woman and 2 men), race/ethnicity (multiple heritage, White, Black), socioeconomic status (middle class and upper middle class), and backgrounds that we based on city versus rural living. It was clear throughout the training that the mentors learned different things from each of the trainers, and the mentors were pleased to have such different viewpoints.

Additional research could also provide the parents of mentees with best practice models for engaging their children. Efforts to continue to help young people move away from negative influences and are focused not on just helping but on celebrating success could also make a difference in the lives of children faced with academic and behavioral challenges. Finally, conducting more formal evaluations of the mentor training and the outcomes with mentees could lead to further development of the overall program and the acquisition of grants to fund continuation and expansion of the mentoring program.

Through the training of the mentors and the feedback received from them, we are left with hope that there are ways to positively interact with today's youth that can lead to future success. Replication of this training program and new research can provide those answers.

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Appendix

Mentor Training Evaluation

Thank you for attending the Mentor Training program on July 25th for the Opt-In program. This evaluation is for the training that focused on the mentoring relationship. Please think of only this part of the training when answering the following questions. Thank you for helping us by completing this evaluation. All answers are and will remain anonymous.

1. How valuable did you find the mentor training experience when applied to your mentoring relationship?
___Very Valuable
___Somewhat Valuable
___Not Valuable at All
   How did you apply the knowledge from your mentor training to your mentor relationship?

2. When you left the training, what level of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a mentor did you have?
___Excellent
___Good
___Poor
   What do you believe are the roles and responsibilities of a mentor?

3. Do you believe that the training covered the issues of inclusiveness and diversity adequately?
___Yes
___Maybe
___No
   Why or why not?

4. Do you believe that this training covered issues of ethics adequately?
___Yes
___Maybe
___No
   What (if any) ethical issues were missing from the training?

5. What section of the training did you find most valuable?

6. What section of the training did you find least valuable?

7. What topics, issues, etc. would you hope to see in future trainings?

8. Any comments, questions, or suggestions for future trainings.

9. What is your gender?
__Female
__Male

10. How do you define yourself racially?

11. What is your age?
__18 to 24
__25 to 34
__35 to 44
__45 to 54
__55 to 64
__65 to 74
__75 or older

12. What is the highest level of education you have completed?