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DEVELOPING A MENTORING PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT EVALUATION MODEL

John A. Henschke

ABSTRACT

Formal adult teacher model mentoring programs tend to have a predictable set of elements: policies, mentor selection procedures, mentor training activities, mentor role expectations, mentor-adult teacher matching, and secondary developmental relationships. Mentoring is an individualized, long-term, teaching/learning relationship between two people used to accomplish a variety of purposes. Yet, little evaluation has been conducted to determine its results, or the effectiveness of the current process, with an eye to making program improvements. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to: develop a program improvement model for an adult teacher mentoring program; apply the model to a formal adult teacher mentoring program; perform a metaevaluation of the model and implementation; and, recommend changes to the model. A case study design was used to accomplish the purpose. Three data sources included individual and group interviews, and 1988 to 1993 historical program documentation. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select nineteen interviewees from a possible forty-two. The model included defining evaluative questions, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and reporting, an experienced metaevaluator addressed the model's trustworthiness. Findings confirmed little program accountability, site condition adaptations, model authenticity, and added to the model, identifying stakeholders and decision makers, and replanning and redesign.

INTRODUCTION

Formal adult teacher mentoring programs tend to have a predictable set of elements: policies, mentor selection procedures, mentor training activities, mentor role expectations, adult teacher role expectations, mentor-adult teacher matching, and secondary developmental relationships. These elements could be considered as constituting a model mentoring program. General research on the mentoring relationship, which is a teaching/learning transaction, indicates that mentoring is an individualized, long-term relationship between two people; and, the attitudes, beliefs, values, knowledge, and skills imparted by a mentor to a protégé result from wisdom and experience of the mentor, not from innate character traits.

Mentoring has been used for: religious instruction of children, enhancing the skills and intellectual development of young men entering adulthood, transforming returning higher education students' vision of their future, transitions from one occupation to another, career advancement and employment opportunities in business, helping girls undertake the responsibilities of motherhood and homemaking, men to adapt to life changes, helping clergy learn the ministry profession, enhancing learning in the workplace for better functioning on the job (Knowles, 1972), beginning teachers to develop expertise in the instructional process, availability of help even in the self-directed learning process (Tough, 1979), and seasoned instructors to undertake new ways of educating.

Although formal mentoring programs have been around for many centuries and applied to many contexts and situations, little evaluation has been conducted to determine its results, or the effectiveness of the current process, with an eye to making program improvements.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

MENTORING

Kram (1985) has extensively investigated mentoring in business. He interviewed numerous people

at various levels in the organizations: fifteen junior-level managers, twenty-five mentor-protégé pairs, and ten officers. He believes that developmental work relationships occur throughout the full range of career life and are affected by the life and career stages of participants and the organizational context in which the relationship happens. He thus concludes from the research that formal mentoring programs are ineffective because mentoring relationships cannot be engineered, and individuals are most likely to develop a variety of relationships that provide some mentoring functions, instead of meeting all their needs in one relationship.

Merriam (1983) suggested that thoughtful, cautious consideration be given to developing formal mentoring programs. Her extensive mentoring literature review showed the phenomena of mentoring as not clearly conceptualized and research designs as unsophisticated and poorly, if ever, evaluated.

Nevertheless, mentoring relationships are continuing to be prescribed as part of comprehensive preparation programs for beginning adult teachers. Cruickshank (1989) reports that forty states indicate some activity along this line. Waters and Bernhardt (1989) caution that this push for mentoring programs not be allowed to mask the complexity of designing these programs.

EVALUATION

There is a clear distinction between types of program evaluation which are conducted, formative and summative. Formative evaluation provides feedback to people who are trying to improve something. Summative evaluation provides information for decision makers who are wondering whether to fund, terminate, or purchase something (Scriven, 1980, pp. 6-7).

This study utilized an existing state-mandated formal mentoring program to inform the original design of an evaluation model and its subsequent improvement, thus making moot any further discussion of improvement (formative) versus performance (summative) evaluations. In choosing the formative evaluation, the positivist approach was eliminated since in the mandated mentoring program there were no: clear goals, prespecified causal linkages, preordinate evaluation designs, objective or generalizable judgments of program worth.

The interpretive approach of formative evaluation was chosen because of the compatible assumptions: (1) knowledge and theory are both propositional and tacit, based on theory and personal intuition, experiences and beliefs; (2) causal links among program goals and outcomes are studied as they naturally occur in the program without imposition of external controls or manipulation; (3) evaluative models are evolutionary instead of preordinate; and, (4) evaluation results are a combination of description and judgment of program merit in a particularized context.

PURPOSE

The mentoring and evaluation literature review formed the basis of formulating the purpose of this study which was (1) to develop a program improvement evaluation model for an adult teacher mentor program; (2) to apply the model to a formal adult teacher mentoring program; (3) to perform a metaevaluation of the model and its implementation; and, (4) to recommend changes to the model.

ASSUMPTIONS

This model was also based upon three major assumptions derived from the mentoring and evaluation literatures and upon a conventional definition of formative evaluation. The three assumptions are that adult teacher mentoring programs: (1) can be conceptualized as supporting a complex web of relationships designed to affect the behavior and beliefs of both mentors and mentees; (2) are not discrete isolated entities but a series of related activities embedded in a

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broader organizational context which affects the structure, process, and evaluation of the program; and, (3) have stakeholders who hold disparate views which present a rich set of multiple realities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS/FORESHADOWING ISSUES

Several foreshadowing issues emerged from the literature review which helped formulate the questions which guided this research. Does the evaluation and its implementation: (1) Access relevant audiences and serve their practical needs? (2) Respect individual rights and standards of ethical practice? (3) Differentiate mentor and mentee perceptions regarding mentoring activities among various program sites? (4) Indicate how and why mentees access other developmental work relationships? (5) Identify organizational barriers to mentoring? and, (6) Show relative effectiveness of mentoring selection and training?

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

A case study research design (Yin, 1981) was used to: design the mentor program improvement evaluation model; implement the model; conduct a metaevaluation of the model and its implementation; and, recommend changes to the model. Three data sources were utilized for triangulation in the study: taped, guided individual and group interviews, and 1988 to 1993 historical program documentation. A purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 1980) was used to select nineteen interviewees from a sample population of forty-two. The formative mentor program improvement evaluation model includes: defining evaluation questions, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and reporting shown in Figure 1. The metaevaluation was conducted by an independent auditor experienced in qualitative research, and addressed the trustworthiness— credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability—of implementing the model.

Phase 1
Define evaluation questions
Activities:
*Review evaluation and mentor research
*Interview program director and Professional
  Development Committee
Products:
*Preliminary interview guides

Phase 2
Data collection
Activities:
*Site interviews
*Collect program documents

Products:
*Narrative site summaries
Verification:
*Interviewees

Phase 3
Data analysis & interpretation
Activities:
*Site analysis
*Theme and pattern analysis
*Document analysis
Products:
*Case summary

Verification:
*Professional Development Committee

Phase 3
Reporting
Activities:
*Write reports
*Distribute reports
*Collect verification comments
Products:
*Comprehensive case report
*Executive summary reports
Verification:
*Evaluation participants

Figure 1. Formative Evaluation Program Improvement Model

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings of the metaevaluation process indicated little evidence of individual or program-wide accountability. Figure 2 displays the conditions, causes and consequent adaptations, which as reported by interview subjects, tended to affect their ability to be in a mentor relationship.

CONDITIONS	CAUSES	ADAPTATIONS
TIME TO MEET		
Adequate	*Synchronous or compatible schedules	*Frequent meetings *Increased adoption of mentor duties
Inadequate	*Mismatched schedules *Assignment mismatch	*No formal meetings *Spontaneous "quick fix" crises meetings only *First-year teacher forms substitute relationship
ASSIGNMENT MATCH		
Good	*Trained mentor available at grade level or in same department as first-year teacher	*Frequent meetings *Variety of mentor assistance given to first-year teacher
Poor	*Lack of qualified mentor in the cadre to meet the need *Planned mismatch to increase communication among departments	*Infrequent meetings *Repeated use of the same mentors *Mentor role dissonance *Teammates instead of formal mentor
PROXIMITY		
Near	*Grade level or department match	*Frequent meetings
Distant	*Assignment mismatch	*Infrequent meetings *Decrease in types of assistance given to first-year teacher *Beginner forms substitute relationship
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT		
Adequate	*Administrator plans aide coverage for mentor and first-year teacher to meet *Administrator evaluates mentor-beginner relationship	*Increased adoption of mentor duties
Inadequate	*Poor administrator communication with mentor and first-year teacher	*Mentor role dissonance *Mentor feels unaccountable

Figure 2. Conditions Affecting the Mentor Relationship

The auditor verified the implementation of the model as an authentic evaluation to: fairly portray program participants views; increase participant awareness of the program environment; increase participant understanding of how others value and hold meaning for the program; and, effect actual program changes as a result of the evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A revised mentor program evaluation model was fashioned for improvement of the mentoring program as a conclusion of the metaevaluation which adds two phases to the original four phases. The two new phases are now Phase 1 and Phase 6. This revision is shown on Figure 3.

Phase 1
**Identify stakeholders and decision
decision makers**
Activities:
*Define audiences of the evaluation
*Describe sites program locations
Products:
·*List of stakeholders and decision makers

Phase 2
Define evaluation questions

Activities:
*Review evaluation and mentor research
*Interview program director
Products:
*Focus group interview guides

Phase 3
Data collection
Activities:
*Conduct site focus groups
*Design questionnaires
*Plan and schedule use of the questionnaire
*Deliver and collect questionnaire returns
Products:
*Summary of focus group notes by site
*Completed questionnaires sorted by sites

Phase 3
Data analysis & interpretation
Activities:
*Analysis of site data
*Theme and pattern analysis

Products:
*Site summaries

Phase 5
Reporting
Activities:
*Write reports
*Distribute reports to program participants
Products:
*Annual summary report

Phase 6
Replanning and design
Activities:
*Plan program changes
*Plan strategies to monitor changes
Products:
*Program procedures
*Evaluation plan

Figure 3. Revised Formative Evaluation Program Improvement Model

Implications of this study are that the findings and conclusions may be useful to adult, extension, community, and continuing educators seeking to prepare and/or mentor new educators of adults being engaged to teach in their programs. Professional development organizations, state departments of education, university or college faculty, and corporate human resource developers who provide preparation for teachers of adults could also use these findings and conclusions for upgrading the quality of teaching, mentoring, learning and performance which would result.

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