33

YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately 5,690,000 school-aged children in the United States have some form of physical, emotional, and/or cognitive impairment that limits one or more of their major life activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Youth with disabilities constitute 10% of all people under the age of 21 in the United States (Asch, Rousso, & Jefferies, 2001). They regularly encounter the personal and social consequences of membership in a stigmatized minority group (Charlton, 1998; Fine & Asch, 1988) and the challenges of having an impairment. Youth with disabilities frequently experience high levels of social and physical exclusion. They often grow up in families without other people with disabilities, and well-meaning family members may be more concerned with protecting them from harm than encouraging them toward independence (Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001). In fact, the more severe the disability, the less likely the youth is to engage in age-appropriate activities with peers (Odom, McConnell, & McEvoy, 1992).

As a result of this segregation and other factors that limit their prospects for community integration and personal fulfillment, youth with disabilities are at risk for poor developmental outcomes. Consequently youth with disabilities are less well equipped with the emotional, social, and cognitive resources necessary to achieve positive life outcomes. For example, few youth with disabilities pursue postsecondary education, and as adults, many face unemployment or underemployment and low levels of engagement with their communities (Charlton, 1998; Newman, 1992; Wagner, 1992; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbeler, & Newman, 1993).

The at-risk status of youth with disabilities, coupled with findings indicating that other at-risk youth have benefited significantly from having caring adults in their lives (Rhodes, 2002), has led researchers and practitioners to consider mentoring programs as one way of promoting positive development among this population. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, few mentoring programs have made an active attempt to include young disabled people (Rousso, 2001, p. 341). Program staff may believe that they are not properly trained to meet the needs of disabled youth. Staff may assume that youth with disabilities cannot participate or fear that, if disabled youth attend, nondisabled youth will leave the program. Youth with disabilities may also face problems with the inaccessibility of program settings, activities, or transportation, as well as overprotective parents (Froschl, Rousso, & Rubin, 2001). In addition, there are few mentoring programs designed specifically for youth with disabilities.

In this chapter, we first consider theoretical concerns related to mentoring youth with disabilities. We examine the construct of disability as well as dimensions of mentoring relationships (program-sponsored or naturally occurring) and programs that may be of particular importance to youth with disabilities. We then review research on mentoring programs for youth with disabilities according to the age of the mentees. Next, we consider issues of practice, focusing in particular on those that appear promising but have not yet received rigorous evaluation. Finally, we synthesize material from the preceding sections and offer recommendations for future research and practice.

THEORY

Conceptualizations of disability and their corresponding definitions have varied over the years. Traditional frameworks of disability emphasize the medical nature of disability and focus on individual-centered deficits and impairments. Newer paradigms depart from a medical framing of disability by defining it primarily as a social issue. Here, the focus is on the relationship between the disability and the environment; relevant elements of the environment are stressed as primary determinants of the experience of having a disability. Under this socioecological model, disability is redefined as a function of the person in context. The disability experience is now viewed as the gap between what a person is capable of and the demands of his or her environment. Herein, disability is not inherent to an individual, but is instead located in the interaction between the individual and his or her environment. In this paradigm of disability, *impairment* is used to refer to the biological basis of disability, whereas *disability* is reserved to describe the individual-environment interactions that create the disability experience (Brand & Pope, 1997; Nagi, 1991; Pledger, 2003; Rioux, 1997).

As we seek to understand the experience of disability, it is useful to consider factors that may contribute to the at-risk status of youth with disabilities. In particular, it is important to consider the socially created disadvantages that may accrue among persons with impairments as well as contextual barriers that can limit their community integration (Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001). This social perspective refocuses our attention away from the traditional assumptions of individual dysfunction and pathology toward a view that is sensitive to the manner in which adverse consequences of disability often are created through social and/or physical structures that discriminate against people with impairments (Pledger, 2003; Rioux, 1997).

This socioecological conceptualization of disability stresses that youth with disabilities regularly confront both the social implications of having a stigmatizing condition as well as the functional limitations that arise from decreased mobility, cognitive processing or aptitude, and/or emotional stability. Furthermore, it emphasizes that specific experiences linked to disability status can be amplified or mitigated by contextual elements, including the specific type of disability, gender, race/ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status of the youth (Block, Balcazar, & Keys, 2002; Newman, 1992; Rousso & Wehmeyer, 2001; Wagner, 1992; Wagner et al., 1993).

Emerging conceptual models in disability studies help us understand processes that may lead to poor adulthood outcomes for people with disabilities. Many disability scholars argue in this regard that an important role is played by the pervasive assumptions of the pathology, incompetence, and helplessness of people with disabilities (Fine & Asch, 1988). Assumptions of disease and incapacity can both dehumanize youth with disabilities and engender feelings of inferiority and hopelessness about the future (Charlton, 1998; Froschl et al., 2001; Rousso, 2001). Experiences of assumed incapacity may affect youth adversely at school, in their communities, and with their families and, in the long run, contribute to poor adulthood outcomes. Common experiences include exclusion from neighborhood schools and youth-specific programs, as well as a lack of exposure to appropriate adult role models with disabilities (Froschl et al., 2001; Wagner et al., 1993). The absence of adult role models with disabilities is of particular theoretical relevance because most youth with disabilities are raised by nondisabled parents (Charlton, 1998; Rousso, 2001).

With this socioecological view of disability, we can consider theoretical concerns most

relevant to mentoring relationships and programs for youth with disabilities. In general, these factors can be dichotomized as program elements that seek to engage youth with disabilities and "plug into" their lives and elements that seek to motivate youth with disabilities and activate their interest in positive development. Elements that plug into youth's lives include mentoring programs that have a developmentally appropriate focus, are accessible, and involve early intervention, family members, and multiple intervention components. Elements that activate youth with disabilities include assuming a competence-based approach, promoting the youth's control, engaging successful mentors with disabilities, and focusing on the youth's interests and goal attainment. With respect to program elements that plug into the life circumstances of youth with disabilities, implementing programs that are developmentally appropriate is critical. Both the form of the relationship encouraged and the goals of the mentoring relationship must respond to the developmental age of the youth. Second, program accessibility may be a key dimension of successfully mentoring youth with disabilities. Program accessibility refers to a competence-based philosophy that youth can participate given proper social and physical conditions. Accessibility includes designing the program so that youth with disabilities can participate (e.g., accessible transport, materials, and activities and adequate supports), establishing appropriate goals, and including disability awareness training for mentors as needed so that youth with disabilities can fully engage in the mentoring relationship. For example, e-mentoring (i.e., mentoring via the Internet) may hold significant potential to be well adapted to youth who face physical barriers (e.g., living in rural locations and challenges with accessibility of transport or buildings) to connecting with mentors. Similarly, a personal care attendant may be necessary for a youth with quadriplegia to assist with her bodily functions so that she can attend activities; plainly written instructions may make an activity understandable to a youth with an intellectual disability; and asking that mentors use fragrance-free products may make an environment accessible for a youth with multiple chemical sensitivities. Beyond ensuring equal access, mentoring programs that affirmatively

recruit, welcome, engage, and support youth with disabilities are likely to have a more positive impact.

Focusing on early intervention, families, and multiple program components may also help mentoring programs plug into the lives of youth with disabilities. Attention to early intervention may serve these youth particularly well. Early intervention can promote positive development before multiple disadvantages have accrued and before a path toward negative life outcomes has further advanced. Such an approach would include, for example, addressing positive aspects of disability from an early age rather than after a youth's problems with self-concept have compounded. Second, because youth with disabilities mature within families in which they are often the only person with a disability, the more mentoring programs can reach out to include family members, the more effective they may be. Exposure to mentors with disabilities may help families understand disability better and see, for the first time, evidence of a child's strengths and possibilities for his or her future. As a result, the youth's social environment may improve, thus bolstering positive effects across settings. Last, one clear directive of socioecological model of disability is the possibility that mentoring alone may be able to address only certain experiences linked to having a disability. To fully address the needs of youth with disabilities, it may be imperative to consider additional forms of intervention/service provision, such as skill building (e.g., teaching youth how to recruit help) (Balcazar, Keys, & Garate, 1995).

It is also critical that mentoring programs activate the interest of youth with disabilities. To do so, approaches that are strengths based, accord control to mentee and work toward their goal attainment, engage mentors with disabilities, and focus on the interests of youth may be particularly useful. A competence-based approach to mentoring assumes youth can successfully engage in relationships, derive benefit from them, and plays to their strengths. Mentoring by definition involves relationship (DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002; Rhodes, 2002); relationships by definition involve power dynamics (Charlton, 1998). People with disabilities, historically, have had relatively little control over their lives. As such, since the helping relationships inherent to

mentoring can take a variety of forms, we must be vigilant to these constructs as we consider mentoring these youth. Although some helping relationships further disempower marginalized groups by reinforcing their powerlessness, other helping relationships can empower members of these groups by promoting their competence, abilities, and influence (Epse-Sherwindt & Kerlin, 1990; Tucker & Johnson, 1989). Thus, empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995) also plays a potentially important role in understanding how some mentoring relationships can lead youth to grow and mature while others may reinforce dependency. A natural correlate of this process is the construct of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 2002). Self-determination involves addressing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students with disabilities need to take more control over and responsibility for their lives. Preparing youth to lead self-determined lives is especially important as youth mature into adults. In part, fostering self-determination through mentoring includes helping youth set and work toward goals.

The final constructs important to activating youth with disabilities involve using mentors with disabilities and focusing on the interests of youth. Since few youth with disabilities have contact with successful adults with disabilities, in fostering such relationships, mentoring programs can fulfill a unique need in the lives of these youth and go a long way in addressing their social isolation. Engaging mentors with disabilities similar to their mentees may serve particularly well to help youth identify with mentors (Rhodes, 2002), perceive positive aspects of disability, and begin to envision successful life outcomes for themselves. A final directive of the socioecological framework of disability highlights that much previous research and practices have, in fact, been highly irrelevant to the lived experience of disability (e.g., a focus on medical concerns rather than social concerns). In line with this consideration is that programs must be sensitive to the variety of interests and unique perspectives of youth with disabilities that stem from the experience of many social identities, not merely a disability-specific identity.

To summarize, conceptualizations of disability as a socioecological process point to the multiple unique dimensions of mentoring youth with disabilities that may be relevant to fostering benefits for these youth. We have identified nine factors that may have particular value for increasing the likelihood of success in mentoring children and youth with disabilities. Four of these factors engage youth with program elements that plug into their lives and their life contexts: having a developmentally appropriate focus, fostering program accessibility, intervening early, and incorporating families. An additional five factors seek to motivate youth by activating their interest: taking a competence-based perspective, promoting participant influence on and control of mentoring activities and life situations, focusing on goal attainment, engaging successful individuals with similar disabilities, and making the program relevant to the lives and interests of youth.

RESEARCH

We searched relevant databases and reference lists for manuscripts on mentoring programs and/or naturally occurring relationships involving youth with disabilities with a mean age equal to or less than 19. We limited our definition of mentoring to a relationship with one mentor. The searches yielded 14 empirical investigations of mentoring programs for youth with disabilities but none specifically addressing naturally occurring mentoring relationships. Of the 14 studies, 10 were peer-reviewed, published empirical studies and 3 were ERIC project reports and/or briefings. The final study was an unpublished manuscript.

Given the small body of extant research on this topic, it becomes critical to note the research designs and their corresponding rigor as we evaluate the validity of and support for researchers' conclusions. In terms of research design, one study used an experimental (i.e., randomized) design. Three studies used a quasi-experimental, pre/post design with matched comparison groups; a fourth used a similar design but with posttests only. The findings of these studies thus begin to address issues of program impact. Of the other 9 studies, several of which relied heavily on qualitative methodologies, 3 used a single-group design with either pre/post assessments or multiple assessments

during the course of the program, and 6 used a posttest-only, single-group design. Due to multiple threats to internal validity, these studies are inherently limited in their ability to address issues of program impact (see Grossman, this volume). However, their findings do provide insights into specific processes that may be important to focus on as potential facilitators of relationship and program effectiveness for youth with disabilities.

We use their age to structure the review of research because program goals and formulations varied greatly depending on the age of mentees. Following consideration of specific studies pertaining to preschool, elementary and middle school, and high school youth, both methodological and substantive issues relating to these studies and their findings are discussed.

Preschool Children

At the preschool stage of development, family involvement and early intervention are of particular interest. Watkins and colleagues (1998) investigated the usefulness of having adult deaf mentors share their language (American Sign Language [ASL]), culture, and knowledge of deafness with young deaf children (aged 0–5) and their parents. During home visits across an average of 17.6 months, deaf mentors worked on communication and language skills and exposed families to Deaf culture. Families also received parent advisor home visits. The evaluation centered on the capacity of the program to promote children's ASL language and communication, interfamilial communication, and positive parental attitudes about deafness. Participating children ($n = 18$) and a matched comparison group of children ($n = 18$) from a different state who received parent advisor home visits only were tested on language skills every 6 months. Child–parent interactions were videotaped regularly, and parents' attitudes were assessed at completion of the program. Results were encouraging: Relative to comparison group children, mentored children demonstrated quicker and greater gains in language communication skills. The parents of mentored children, furthermore, demonstrated greater comfort in interacting using both ASL and signed English relative to parents of control

group children. They also expressed perceptions more consistent with contemporary values of Deaf culture and community. Consistent with theoretical considerations discussed previously, the use of mentors with disabilities, early intervention, and the inclusion of the parents may have served to address the children's social isolation and to promote positive perspectives on disability.

Shepard-Tew and Forgione (1999) recruited middle school students with learning disabilities to help preschool children ($n = 29$) overcome physical and emotional challenges believed to inhibit their engagement in an arts program. Unfortunately, the researchers measured a very limited number of outcomes, thus failing to make it possible to ascertain the efficacy of this model, particularly with respect to its impact on mentees. Using posttraining, prementoring questionnaires, the researchers found that mentors expressed a high degree of comfort with the task ahead of them and behaved appropriately at the arts festival. They also found that with the support of mentors, the preschoolers were able to participate in the arts program. The researchers did not investigate additional effects of the program on mentees. This program points to the potential benefits of early intervention and accessibility considerations.

Elementary and Middle School Youth

Five studies were conducted with elementary and/or middle school youth. These studies point to the potential benefits of making programs age appropriate, involving families, using mentors with disabilities, and fostering youth self-determination. In a qualitative study rich with potential constructs of interest, Todis, Powers, Irvin, and Singer (1996) examined the experiences of three youth who participated in a mentoring program designed to promote the competence and independence among children with physical disabilities. Each youth was matched with a successful adult who had a similar physical disability. Pairs were expected to complete community-based activities in specified domains (e.g., visit to mentor's home, engage in recreational activities) but were given control over the details of these activities and two additional ones. Each pair completed a variety of activities

that primarily followed the interests of the mentee over a period of approximately 6 months. Interviews and field observations yielded a complex picture of elements of the mentor-mentee relationship that may have promoted or thwarted the goals of the project. Generalized behavioral changes were observed for only one of the three mentees. One participant appeared to be too young and immature to benefit significantly from the relationship. He demonstrated behavioral changes toward greater independence in the company of his mentor, but these changes did not transfer to his interactions with others. There was, however, evidence that his parent gained beneficial knowledge including accessibility-focused home remodeling ideas, disability-specific knowledge and culture, and new perspectives of her son. The other participant to fail to exhibit noteworthy change already demonstrated a substantial degree of independence and self-competence at the outset of the study. It appeared that the mentoring relationship was not able to facilitate or advance this youth's stated interests in mastering the finer points of social integration. The remaining mentee evidenced gains in skills and confidence (e.g., taking greater initiative) that were noted by her family and readily apparent in how she conducted herself. She also appeared to become more vocal and integrated into her family. Her relationship with her mentor was characterized by the least amount of mentor control. Although this study may not greatly contribute to generalizable knowledge about the impact of mentoring youth with disabilities, it makes important contributions in identifying processes and conditions under which programs may be more effective. These theoretical considerations include elements of control, inclusion of the youth's family, and the reminder that mentoring may not be able to affect the needs of all youth.

Shedding further light on potential factors relevant to mentoring youth with disabilities, four additional studies have been done with this age group and deserve attention with respect to evaluation design and findings. Noll (1997) used a single-group, posttest design and observational data to conduct a process evaluation of a program using cross-age (ninth graders), nondisabled peers as mentors to promote the social and academic success of seventh graders (n not reported). Findings suggested that mentees experienced less social rejection and more classroom acceptable behavior. Similarly, Muscott, O'Brien, and College (1999) recruited nondisabled high school and college students to promote character education among elementary school students with serious emotional disturbances and learning disabilities. Based on observations and interviews with 24 youth, they concluded that mentees had learned skills that would help them to make friends, work more effectively in groups, and be more engaged citizen-leaders. Because of the absence of a comparison group and pretest data, however, these conclusions must be regarded as speculative. Also in a school setting, Buckner (1993) sought to improve the social and academic success of middle school students with leaning disabilities ($n = 18$) by pairing them with same-age mentor/ tutors and an adult professional. Using a single-group, pre/post test design, findings indicated improvements in academics, attendance, and self-esteem. Last, using the same design as Buckner, Packer (1994) matched hearing buddies to mainstreamed elementary children with hearing disabilities and found that their rates of interactions with nondisabled peers increased for participants in the program.

High School Youth

Seven mentoring studies targeted high school students with disabilities. One notable contribution of this set of studies is their emphasis on goal attainment and connections to adults with disabilities. Powers, Sowers, and Stevens (1995) used a randomized posttest-only design to evaluate an intervention to promote perceived self-efficacy and knowledge of the community among adolescents with physical disabilities. For 6 months, adult mentors and adolescent mentees who had similar physical disabilities met twice a month to pursue natural activities selected together. Mentors were expected to model strategies for managing assistance that would be relevant to the youth as well as to focus on issues related to accessibility, such as housing adaptations and agency services. Following completion of the program, although there were no group differences with respect to general self-efficacy, mentored youth ($n = 5$) did

report higher levels of disability-specific self-efficacy relative to the control group ($n = 5$). Based on survey responses, mentored youth also demonstrated greater knowledge related to overcoming barriers to community participation than the nonmentored youth. Reports of parents, furthermore, suggested that only mentored children showed gains in community knowledge and self-confidence. Findings from interviews with participating youth and their parents were consistent with these results. On the one hand, there was potential for reports to be biased positively by knowledge of the youth's participation in the program. On the other, this is to our knowledge the only published study of youth with disabilities to use a randomized group design. Therefore, inferences regarding program impact are made with cautious confidence.

Welkowitz and Fox (2000) used small groups of disabled and nondisabled youth facilitated by an adult to promote the self-concept and school success of high school students with emotional-behavioral disabilities. Pre- and posttest qualitative and quantitative assessments of more than 100 youth in two schools revealed greater improvements in absenteeism and disciplinary referrals for mentored youth relative to nonmentored youth, as well as slightly greater improvements in relational skills as measured by a variety of surveys.

Rousso (2001) evaluated a community-based project that sought to strengthen the educational, vocational, and social aspirations of adolescent girls with physical and sensory disabilities. Most notably, this program demonstrated innovative ways to activate the interest of participating youth by making program content relevant. It also highlighted the utility of mentors with disabilities and a goal-focused approach. To develop the mentoring program, two conferences were held in which each party discussed what they would like to learn and share. Project staff also addressed the topic of giving and receiving help. Mentors, who were accomplished women with disabilities, were asked to serve as positive role models in order to help mentees develop constructive, realistic aspirations. Pairs interacted in a variety of ways to meet their needs (e.g., addressing inaccessible environments) and interests, including conversations over the telephone and outings.

Relationships were expected to last 1 to 2 years, with meetings occurring every 4 to 6 weeks. However, less than one half of the pairs met beyond a few months. In a process-oriented evaluation, staff conducted direct observations, participants completed feedback forms, and mentees answered questionnaires and participated in interviews. In their questionnaires and interview responses, most of the mentees reported being inspired by their mentors. They indicated that they had begun to take steps toward greater independence, including taking public transportation, arranging for their own transit, and expanding their goals. They also noted that their relationships with their mentors helped facilitate moving out of their parents' homes. Additional findings from the evaluation suggest that while access to a mentor may assist adolescent girls with positive visions for their futures, a mentor does not necessarily help the girl develop the skills required to realize that vision (e.g., self-advocacy, problem solving). Consequently, the researchers recommended that a skills development component be added so that girls could implement their visions; such a component was later added to the project (Rousso, 2001).

Moccia, Schumaker, Hazel, Vernon, and Deshler (1989) evaluated a project designed to facilitate the transition into adulthood of 32 high school students with learning disabilities. Their research highlights the utility of goal-focused mentoring. Nondisabled adults from the community were expected to work regularly with mentees for about a year to help the mentee complete high school and become engaged in satisfying adult pursuits. Mentees met with their mentors and project staff to set specific goals related to, for example, education, careers, and independent living and to develop the subgoals and tasks that would be implemented to achieve their major goals (e.g., outlining tasks necessary to obtain an associate's degree by a specified date). Outcomes were assessed through the systematic tracking of participants and a nonmentored matched comparison group. After the program, mentored youth were significantly more likely to have graduated from high school and were more satisfied with their high school experiences. Mentored youth also were more likely to have enrolled in higher education and, although they earned less money than the

nonmentored group, were more satisfied with their jobs. Mentored youth, furthermore, were able to identify their aspirations with greater specificity.

West, Targett, Steininger, and Anglin (2001) took a similar approach to promote the acquisition of competitive employment among adolescents with disabilities ($n = 43$). Their work demonstrates the importance of program elements above and beyond mentoring. Adult mentors without disabilities at employment sites were one component of the program. The researchers were pleased that participants obtained employment that had social integration opportunities greater than is typical of entry-level jobs as measured by an index created for the study. However, the researchers also noted that mentees had higher turnover rates than they anticipated but which were not unusually high given the age and experience level of participants.

Last, a group of researchers (Ryerson-Espino et al., 2003; Taylor-Ritzler et al., 2001) examined the effectiveness of combining social skills training with case management (who served in a mentoring capacity) to support the transition to adulthood for ethnic minority high school students with disabilities from low-income communities. Their approach was goal driven and focused on empowering the students to take control of setting and achieving their goals. This model was evaluated using both a single-group, pre/post test design and a matched comparison group, pre/post test design, with data on outcome measures obtained from skill development exercises and goal attainment logs. Results from both studies indicate the intervention's success. Participating youth developed mentoring relationships primarily with case managers but in some cases with community members, thereby increasing networks of available instrumental support, and used a wider variety of self-help strategies. Furthermore, participants addressed challenges more successfully and attained more of their employment and independent living goals.

Conclusions

The 14 studies reviewed employed a variety of methodological approaches to investigate mentoring programs and relationships for youth with disabilities. The studies evaluated programs designed to use mentoring relationships to help youth with disabilities overcome obstacles, achieve their goals, participate in community life, improve existing skills, and/or develop new competencies. Overall, findings provide preliminary evidence of the benefits of mentoring for youth with disabilities. At the same time, in accordance with a broad socioecological view of factors affecting the outcomes of this population, the modest magnitude of the effects suggested by data also implies that the mentoring experience may be best regarded as only one of many contextual factors with the potential to exert a significant influence on the complex development of youth with disabilities. However, until more rigorous comparative data are collected that replicate these initial results, these conclusions remain tentative.

Impact of Mentoring Programs

As a result of more scientifically sound research methods and/or similar findings emerging across multiple studies, the following results can be considered to have relatively greater support. It should be noted, however, that in no instances can empirical support be considered definitive in view of limitations in both the scope and quality of existing studies. First, there is evidence that providing mentors to preschool, elementary, and middle school youth with disabilities may be able to promote gains in communication skills (Muscott et al., 1999; Noll, 1997; Watkins et al., 1998). Second, it appears that mentors may be able to assist high school youth with disabilities to attain more positive outcomes following transitions. Research in this regard provides initial evidence that mentoring programs can promote gains in mentees' rates of high school graduation, school attendance, and attainment of employment following graduation (Ryerson-Espino et al., 2003; Taylor-Ritzler et al., 2001; West et al., 2001). Mentors also may be able to increase mentees' level of satisfaction with their high school experiences and jobs, despite having obtained jobs with lower pay than their nonmentored peers (Moccia et al., 1989). Third, there is evidence that mentoring can help school-aged youth with disabilities expand and better articulate their aspirations. Mentoring also seems to inspire

their self-confidence and promote skills related to disability-specific issues, such as independent living and mobility (Powers et al., 1995; Rousso, 2001; Ryerson-Espino et al., 2003; Taylor-Ritzler et al., 2001; Todis et al., 1996). Finally, results suggest that benefits of mentoring extend beyond mentees themselves to their families. These include more positive parental attitudes toward the disability status of their children, greater awareness of how to promote the independence of a child with a disability, and improved family communication (Todis et al., 1996; Watkins et al., 1998).

Other possibilities have received tentative but less clear empirical support. For preschool, elementary, and middle school children with disabilities, these include some evidence of the potential for mentoring to increase their levels of participation in community-based programs (Shepard-Tew, 1999) and improve their in-class behavior (Noll, 1997). Mentoring also may help children and youth with disabilities establish friendships, work with others, and experience less rejection from nondisabled peers (Muscott et al., 1999; Noll, 1997). Mentoring also may help high school youth secure work that has significant potential for social integration (West et al., 2001). Furthermore, serving as mentors may allow youth with disabilities to gain confidence in their ability to help (Shepard-Tew, 1999).

Facilitating Factors

Although not yet systematically investigated, several elements of programs and relationships are highlighted by extant research (particularly qualitative studies) as potentially important facilitators of positive outcomes for youth with disabilities. Consistent with theoretical considerations discussed previously, some findings have suggested that both a low level of control exhibited by the mentor and the ability of the mentor to build trust through listening to the mentee may be important in helping the mentee engage in and derive benefit from the relationship (Rousso, 2001; Todis et al., 1996). Other findings have suggested that engaging youth in an enjoyable program is important for boosting participation and motivating mentees (Muscott et al., 1999). Other results have pointed toward

an emphasis on skill development that is appropriate to the mentee's skill and maturity level (Rousso, 2001; Ryerson-Espino et al., 2003; Taylor-Ritzler et al., 2001; Todis et al., 1996), having mentors with whom youth could identify (i.e., those who have similar disabilities; Powers et al., 1995; Rousso, 2001; Todis et al., 1996), parent involvement (Todis et al., 1996; Watkins et al., 1998), and establishing clear goals for the mentoring relationship (Ryerson-Espino et al., 2003; Taylor-Ritzler et al., 2001) as factors allowing youth to benefit more from the mentoring relationship. Although based on very limited empirical data, it is noteworthy again that these possibilities parallel dimensions of mentoring programs and relationships for youth with disabilities that were noted previously to be potentially important in mediating outcomes from a theoretical perspective. Future research is needed to examine the utility of these hypothesized factors in facilitating the effectiveness of mentoring programs.

PRACTICE

Knowledge gained through research on mentoring youth with disabilities can and should be used to inform practice. At the same time, examining practices not yet evaluated can help identify frontiers of innovation. Given the early state of development of mentoring research concerning youth with disabilities, attending to these practice frontiers may be especially useful. Our focus continues to be on planned mentoring programs since, as with the research studies, we found no accounts of efforts to promote natural mentoring relationships for youth with disabilities, an important shortcoming in the extant literature. In this regard, for the programs considered in this section, we examine the types of youth with disabilities that are targeted for mentoring programs, characteristics of the mentors, program goals, and the ways in which program practices both are consistent with and may go beyond proposed "best practices" for mentoring programs. The reader is reminded that although mentoring programs have exploded in popularity, there has been no active effort reported to date to engage youth with disabilities in general mentoring programs

(Rousso, 2001). Accordingly, our focus remains on programs specific to youth with disabilities.

Targeted Youth

Most research evaluates programs directed at youth with physical or learning disabilities. In comparison, other mentoring programs for which evaluation data do not yet appear to be available have addressed a broader range of disabilities. One prominent example is Best Buddies. Best Buddies is an international organization that provides one-to-one friendships to people, including youth, with intellectual/ developmental disabilities (I/DD) (Best Buddies International, 2004). Their focus on these youth highlights that theoretical considerations concerning mentoring youth with disabilities do not exclude people with I/DD. In fact, these youth too might benefit from mentoring.

Mentor Characteristics

One promising direction within practice is programs that are created by people with disabilities who recognize the need for youth to learn information relevant to their lives. A group of students with learning disabilities in a program designed to promote their self-advocacy felt so positively about the benefits they derived from it that they went on to mentor younger students with learning disabilities in order to impart their emerging expertise (Pocock et al., 2002). This approach has great potential given theoretical considerations that mentees benefit from identifying with a successful disabled mentor and that the relevance may increase as it is peer driven. Yet peer mentoring has not been widely used or evaluated for these youth.

Program Goals

In general, programs described in the literature but not yet evaluated seem to have a strong emphasis on positive development. Consistent with a strengths-based approach, they focus less on deficits in youth with disabilities (e.g., social skills) than do many evaluated programs. One of the most widely disseminated transition-focused programs,

High School/ High-Tech (2003), focuses on promoting careers in science and technology for youth with disabilities. Another program, Mentors, Inc.: Arts & Disability Mentoring (n.d.), aims to support youth with disabilities in their pursuit of professions in the arts industry by connecting youth with art professionals. Started in 1999 by the American Association of People with Disabilities, there is also a National Disability Mentoring Day cosponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy. The day is set aside to profile the National Disability Employment Awareness Month. It seeks to enable youth to learn more about jobs and how to prepare for them. Each of these programs assumes that youth with disabilities can have successful, diverse, and exciting lives and encourages them to participate in a variety of career paths.

Best Practices

The mentoring field in general has benefited from the availability of recommendations for effective practice. Critical elements include well-designed, -planned, -managed, -operated, and -evaluated programs (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2003). Key dimensions of effective mentoring practice suggested by research include careful screening, orientation, and training of mentors; providing ongoing supervision of and support for the mentoring relationship; and providing opportunities for parent involvement (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). It is clear that many of the programs for youth with disabilities are responsive to these guidelines. Unfortunately, we have not yet fully considered how this set of best practices should and can be adapted to youth with disabilities. Program accessibility is clearly a necessary consideration. One particularly promising direction of best practices that addresses accessibility is programs that use e-mentoring (e.g., DO-IT: Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology, 2004). E-mentoring may be particularly well suited to reach youth challenged to connect with others due to inaccessible or unavailable transportation or who live in rural areas.

In sum, mentoring is gradually becoming more available to youth with disabilities often

excluded from programs targeted at youth without disabilities. As this growth takes place, greater innovation is occurring and thus, we hope, strengthening the likelihood of mentoring programs' abilities to promote the positive development and full societal inclusion of youth with disabilities. As they offer practice-related innovations, mentoring programs for youth with disabilities are offering a host of untested material ripe for evaluation.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Synthesis

Mentoring programs directed toward youth with disabilities are growing. Theoretically, there is a basis to expect that mentoring relationships can be beneficial for youth with disabilities. However, the realization of such benefits may depend on a range of factors related to engaging youth by plugging into their lives and motivating them by activating their interests. While extant research has indicated some of the areas of success (e.g., the attainment of communication and social skills, disability-related knowledge and perceived self-efficacy, greater independence, and more favorable transition outcomes) and limitations (e.g., general self-efficacy, advanced social skills) of mentoring for youth with disabilities, we currently know relatively little about the efficacy of elements hypothesized to be crucial to the effectiveness of mentoring relationships or programs for youth with disabilities. Nor has research systematically assessed the impact of potentially important moderators. Programs' abilities to plug into the lives of youth with disabilities (e.g., having developmentally appropriate foci and integrating families) and to activate the interest of these youth (e.g., involve mentors with disabilities and foster self-determination) may determine their effectiveness. Unfortunately, most research to date lacks sufficient rigor or precision to adequately address these hypotheses. From this review, we have identified practice and research-related recommendations intended to foster the continued growth of this area. Recommendations for youth identified in other chapters may bear relevance to youth with disabilities and should be considered as well.

Recommendations for Research

1. *Conduct more qualitative research.* There is a significant need for more qualitative research on mentoring youth with disabilities. This type of investigation is needed to increase awareness and understanding of those aspects of mentoring programs and relationships unique to the experiences and needs of this population that may facilitate or thwart deriving meaningful benefits. Illustratively, qualitative research could prove valuable as a means of illuminating processes relating to issues of control in the mentoring relationships of youth with disabilities, which we have highlighted throughout this chapter as an important theoretical concern. An important aspect qualitative research should examine is naturally occurring mentoring relationships among youth with disabilities. Qualitative methods may be particularly useful in initially elucidating the important elements of these relationships. Although these ties and their formation have received little study to date, naturally occurring mentoring has the potential to inform the planning of future mentoring programs for youth with disabilities.

2. *Broaden sensitivity to sociocultural factors.* Research should attend to dimensions of human diversity that may moderate (by either promoting or impeding) the efficacy of particular approaches to mentoring youth with disabilities. Expanding dimensions of sociocultural variables above and beyond disability, such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, will likely assist us in our understanding of how to successfully structure mentoring programs for a variety of youth with disabilities. There is also a need for attention in research to youth who have a wider variety of disability types and more extensive forms of disabilities, who often may be overlooked as potential beneficiaries of mentoring relationships. In fact, extant research has not yet addressed the role of the severity of the disability—a factor with many important implications for program development and implementation. In addition, whether as researchers or collaborators, people who experience disability themselves should be involved in the design, implementation, and interpretation of research in this area. A participatory approach can be expected to have the

added benefit of promoting a more complete understanding of the complex issues involved in mentoring relationships for youth with disabilities (see Jason et al., 2004).

3. *Investigate untested theory, emerging constructs, and innovative practices specific to youth with disabilities.* Research focused on the further development of key theoretical constructs and related intervention strategies that may have specific relevance to youth with disabilities is sorely needed. We have identified a host of variables that may significantly affect the success of mentoring relationships and programs for this population and thus are promising candidates for investigation. These include issues related to the disability status of the mentor, the degree to which relationships are oriented toward youth empowerment, and the integration of the family into program design. The wide range of current programs that reflect innovative practices yet have not been the subject of investigation represent another promising direction. Studies should also attempt to understand how to promote long-term mentee–mentor relationships and examine the long-term effects of the mentoring experience. Finally, there clearly is a need to systematically examine the utility of best practices from the general mentoring literature and, in doing so, to explore the relative efficacy of adaptations to these practices that are tailored specifically to mentoring youth with disabilities.

4. *Conduct rigorous evaluations of mentoring programs for youth with disabilities.* To strengthen the knowledge base regarding the impact of mentoring programs for youth with disabilities, priority should be given to conducting well-controlled evaluations of programs. Ideally, these should be controlled experiments using random assignment to mentoring conditions. In the absence of true experiments, a priority should be placed on the use of strong quasi-experimental designs such as those that include preassessment and postassessment and a carefully matched comparison group. For evaluations to be informative regarding both outcomes and mediating processes, measures that capture theoretically relevant dimensions of the mentoring relationship should be used. In some cases, relevant measures exist but have

received little or no use. These include, for example, procedures that are available to assess goal attainment in the context of mentoring relationships (Garate-Serafini, Balcazar, Weitlauf, & Keys, 2001).

Recommendations for Practice

1. *Be responsive to evidence for effective mentoring practices.* As research from mentoring programs targeted at youth expands, programs should strive to adopt practices that are consistent with the best available evidence. Some constructs for which there is emerging evidence include involving parents in the program and providing access to successful role models with disabilities. As another example, theory and some research suggest that programs should employ practices that promote the development of relationships in which mentors encourage the self-competence of youth with disabilities and allow them to exercise choices.

2. *Expand emphasis on sociocultural diversity.* Programs should seek to target a wide variety of mentees and mentors. Active engagement of youth and mentors with a variety of forms of disability, particularly those more stigmatized, will expand the group who benefit from mentoring programs. Similarly, more programs not targeted at youth with disabilities should reach out to these youth and make their programs accessible and relevant. Finally, this recommendation demands that we not define youth with disabilities uniquely by their disability status. These youth also have experiences, interests, and concerns, linked to their gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, hobbies, and abilities.

3. *Consider additional program components.* Given the realities of youth with disabilities, it may be unrealistic to assume that a mentor alone can address the variety of needs faced by these youth. These experiences place youth with disabilities at risk in a variety of ways. Attention to a wider variety of interventions and/or program components may increase the efficacy of the mentoring relationship and better serve the needs of this population of youth.

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