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# Mentoring Directors as a Strategy to Improve Quality in Early Childhood Programs

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# Research Notes

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## Mentoring Directors as a Strategy to Improve Quality in Early Childhood Programs

Mentoring and coaching are well established professional development strategies. These relationship-based strategies are often used in conjunction with traditional instructional practices. Most research in this area, however, has focused on the use of mentoring or coaching with teachers to improve teaching practices. This evaluation study conducted for the Ontario Government was designed to determine the extent to which the Mentoring Pairs for Child Care Project achieved its primary goal of enhancing quality in early learning programs in Ontario, Canada by increasing the administrative knowledge and skills of center directors (*supervisors*).<sup>1</sup>

The Mentoring Pairs for Child Care Project (MPCC) includes a formal curriculum to increase the administrative knowledge and skills of directors, facilitation of learning by college instructors (*animators*), and a strong mentoring component emphasizing peer support and collegial learning. All the mentees and mentors in a community formed an Occupational Standards Study Group, facilitated by an animator, which held monthly 3-hour meetings for one year. The monthly meetings examined each of the individual standards for child care administrators and their implications for practice. Between monthly meetings participants engaged in self-reflection and completed assignments. Ongoing communication between mentors and mentees included the exchange of reflective journals, developing program improvement plans, and one-on-one coaching.

### Sample and Instrumentation

Fifty-seven centers in ten communities throughout the province of Ontario were selected for on-site observations in 2010 and 2011. The *Program Administration Scale* (PAS), *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (ECERS-R), and *Caregiver Interaction Scale* (CIS) were used to determine any changes in participants' behavior and quality of organizational practices.<sup>2</sup>

### Findings and Interpretation

#### *Changes in Administrator Behavior*

The PAS was used to determine the degree to which directors applied new knowledge about best practices in program administration as a result of participating in the MPCC project. This scale consists of 25 items clustered in 10 subscales. (The MPCC did not use the Staff Qualifications subscale due to differences in American and Canadian terminology.) Table 1 provides the data for the pre- and post-MPCC total PAS score and each subscale score. Key findings include:

◆ Statistically significant enhancement of administrative practices was found in mentee and mentor centers on the total PAS scale score and for seven of the nine PAS subscales.

◆ The most significant changes occurred in those areas where directors have the most control (human resources development, technology, and marketing and public relations).

◆ The enhanced administrative behavior resulted in demonstrable organizational changes.

**Table 1. Changes in Administrator Behavior (N = 57)**

PAS	Pretest M	Posttest M	T-test
Human Resources Development	2.4	3.1	***
Personnel Cost and Allocation	2.1	2.3	NS
Center Operations	3.2	3.5	*
Child Assessment	2.9	3.2	NS
Fiscal Management	3.3	3.8	*
Program Planning and Evaluation	2.2	2.6	*
Family Partnerships	2.8	3.3	*
Marketing and Public Relations	3.2	4.1	***
Technology	4.1	4.6	**
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b> (All subscales combined)	2.8	3.3	***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

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### Changes in Overall Program Quality

The ECERS-R was used to determine changes in program quality as a result of the centers' participation in the MPCC initiative. This scale consists of 43 items arranged in seven subscales. Table 2 provides data for the pre- and post-MPCC total ECERS-R score and each subscale score. Key findings include:

◆ Statistically significant gains for mentee and mentor centers were found on the total ECERS-R score and four of the seven subscale scores.

◆ The most significant gains occurred in the provision for activities to support positive child development, the use of space and furnishings, personal care routines, and provisions for parents and staff.

ECERS-R	Pretest M	Posttest M	T-test
Space and furnishings	4.7	5.0	*
Personal Care Routines	4.3	4.6	*
Language-Reasoning	4.6	4.6	NS
Activities	3.5	3.8	**
Interaction	6.0	6.2	NS
Program Structure	5.4	5.6	NS
Parents and Staff	5.2	5.5	**
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b> (All subscales combined)	4.6	4.9	***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Changes in Teachers' Interactions with Children

The CIS was used to supplement the data on teacher-child interactions obtained by the ECERS-R. The CIS has a total of 23 items spread across three subscales. Table 3 provides the data for the pre- and post-MPCC scores for each of the CIS subscales. Key findings include:

◆ A statistically significant improvement in teacher sensitivity was found.

◆ A statistically significant decrease in teacher detachment and harshness was also found.

CIS	Pretest M	Posttest M	T-test
Sensitivity	2.9	3.4	***
Harshness	1.1	0.5	***
Detachment	1.3	1.1	*

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

### In Sum

While the sample was small, the results of this study suggest that a relationship-based professional development model is effective in improving directors' administrative practices and centers' overall program quality. In addition, this study also confirmed a strong association between administrative practices, as measured by the PAS, and overall program quality, as measured by the ECERS-R. There was a significant association between centers' pre-PAS scores and their pre-ECERS-R scores ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ) as well as their post-PAS scores and post-ECERS-R scores ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ).

### References

1. Doherty, G. (2011). *The Mentoring Pairs for Child Care Project: Final outcome report*. St. Catharines, Ontario: Early Childhood Community Development Centre.
2. Arnett, J. (1989). Caregivers in child care centers: Does training really matter? *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 10*, 541-552.
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