

Best Practices Review of Literature

Introduction

Quality assessment, best practices, outcomes and program evaluation tools are subjects which all of us must face in our constant efforts to improve our services and attract funding. YIPA has a unique vantage point as a statewide association to observe the ebb and flow of various standards and methods. The purpose of this document is two-fold. First, we hope to share with youth intervention program providers an evolving list of the resources and tools available to measure and identify best practices in the field. Second, we hope to inspire those who are in positions to implement assessment tools or create new, more youth intervention-specific methods to take action. This document provides a literature and web review. For these purposes, YIPA does not support one method over another, nor have we created any new measures. Programs are different and, especially in a field as varied as youth intervention, different programs have different needs. Consider carefully when reading through this document: what are the specific requirements of your organization? What do you hope to gain from past research?

This is a developing document, which should grow over time to encompass new models and studies. Our hope is that it will become a collaborative project – encouraging readers to add information about projects that are not listed. Quality assessment has grown vastly in just a few years. This is especially true in fields like early childhood and out-of-school time, which have successfully developed measures and methods for evaluating best practices within their fields.

The challenge with youth intervention is its diversity. Unlike mentoring, for example, which may vary in practice, but which maintains certain key elements that are shared throughout the field, youth intervention can be counseling, mentoring, restorative justice, anger management, and much more. As a result, broad tools, which can be shared amongst youth intervention programs are scarce. It is extremely difficult to create something that is specific to youth intervention and sufficiently applicable to all kinds of youth intervention that it can be used to compare cases.

Furthermore, there is a lack of consistency among funders and researchers regarding where the point of assessment ought to be. Some argue that the key to defining a program's success is outcomes for youth. Others contend that organizations should consider the quality of its staff and programs. Finally, some assessment tools provide a stamp of approval, which shows that a program abides by certain criteria. Other assessment tools provide a rating system to show how different programs compare. Some tools are designed for self-evaluation, others for evaluation by external reviewers and others for parents or youth to use themselves when choosing a program.

This variation can prove confusing when an organization wishes to begin the process of evaluation. It is important to keep in mind what your organization is hoping to accomplish. For whom is this assessment being conducted? What are the organization's resources for conducting this assessment? Are there any mandatory assessment tools that must be used to receive funding or accreditation? This document cannot answer those questions for you. Once you have a clear sense of what it is that your organization is hoping to accomplish, then this document can provide you with the research, examples and resources that you need.

Useful Websites

These sites are a good place to start looking at the landscape of evaluation tools, quality measures and promising practices.

<http://www.mpmn.org/QualityMentoring.aspx>

This website provides resources on quality studies and evaluation for mentoring. It is part of the Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota's website and focuses on the Quality Mapping Assessment Path (QMAP).

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/AppliedYouthResearch/>

This is the applied research and evaluation page for the University of Minnesota Extension Center for 4-H Youth Development. It includes a variety of resources pertaining to youth development, in particular several documents on evaluation and statewide quality initiatives. This site is the perfect place to start looking at evaluation models and new ideas.

<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/>

This is one of the most comprehensive national evaluations of violence prevention programs. It is run out of the University of Colorado and uses a blueprint model to evaluate programs and practices in intervention and prevention.

<http://www.youthcommunityconnections.org/QualityTaskForce.html>

This website is part of the Youth Community Connections site. It outlines the steps taken by the Quality Task Force in Minnesota and includes their materials and final report.

<http://www.nyec.org/page.cfm?pageID=116>

As part of the National Youth Employment Coalition, this site details the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) Quality Standards for Youth Programs.

<http://www.councilforquality.org>

This website details the mission and resources of the Minnesota Council for Quality. This site focuses more on organizational quality than on quality youth intervention or development programs, but does include some useful resources on evaluation.

<http://www.ppv.org/ppv/index.asp>

This is the website for Public/Private Ventures, an organization focused on research and implementation of high quality programs for low-income communities. Their articles are clear and concise, with excellent advice for researchers and providers.

http://childtrends.org/_catdisp_page.cfm?LID=CD56B3D7-2F05-4F8E-BCC99B05A4CAEA04

This page of the child trends website focuses on their research entitled, "Programs that Work – or Don't – to Enhance Children's Development." The LINKS database is also a useful resource to search for information about programs for specific purposes and populations. The LINKS search function is a wonderful way to look for programs that have been evaluated and narrowing down the information to find the programs most relevant to you.

<http://www.cyfernet.org/index.php?c=6#>

This site has a wonderful index of evaluation tools and strategies and may be building even more personalized online program evaluation tools.

A Note on Sources

Some of the articles cited below are available online free of charge, while others require a subscription to the scholarly journal in which they were published. If there is an article that you cannot find online, please contact YIPA and we will see if we can find a copy. Due to copyright restrictions, we cannot provide full text of all articles at this time.

Meta-Analysis and Learning from Other Organizations' Studies

If you don't have the resources to conduct in-depth self-evaluation or you want to know how your organization's practices compare to others, knowing how to evaluate other studies is crucial. Not all studies are equal and meta-analysis tools can help you to identify the ways in which others have struggled. Some of the most common difficulties with evaluation include lack of randomization, the changing impact of intervention over time, lack of standard measures between studies and discrepancies within the research model. These critiques come from a researcher/ academic point-of-view, so some of their concerns may not seem valid for a practitioner, but it is still useful to know what the academic world is thinking.

Many scholars have conducted meta-analysis on a range of studies and their techniques can be of service when comparing models or when beginning your own evaluation.

Some strong meta-analysis studies include:

Greenwood, Peter. "Prevention and Intervention Programs for Juvenile Offenders." *Future of Children*. 18.2 (2008):185-210. Print.

In this article, Greenwood argues that, "For more than a century, efforts to prevent delinquency have been guided more by the prevailing theories about the causes of delinquent behavior than by whether the efforts achieved the desired effects." This article gives a very useful framework for analysis of prevention and intervention programs.

Lipsey, Mark. "Can Intervention Rehabilitate Serious Delinquents?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 564. (1999): 142-166. Print.

Here, Lipsey shows how intervention programs for serious juvenile delinquents can be successful as an alternative to punitive responses in a meta-analysis of programs.

Flay, Brian, and Linda Collins. "Historical Review of School-Based Randomized Trials for Evaluating Problem Behavior Prevention Programs." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 599. (2005):115-146. Print.

In this meta-analysis, Flay and Collins discuss the historical development of program evaluation models in school-based settings.

Petrosino, Anthony. "Estimates of Randomized Controlled Trials across Six Areas of Childhood Intervention: A Bibliometric Analysis." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 589. (2003):190-202. Print.

In this unique approach Petrosino shows through a comprehensive review of scholarly journals the

lack of strong research models, specifically those with randomization, within youth development programs, juvenile justice and education in particular. He contrasts this to a relatively high number of randomized trials in health-related fields and discusses this apparent lack of conformity in method.

Park-Higgerson, Hyoun-Kyoung. "The Evaluation of School-Based Violence Prevention Programs: A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of School Health*. 78.9 (2008): 458-479. Print.

This article shows another meta-analysis of violence prevention, this time with a focus on school-based programs. They argue that their study showed no significant differences between programs that used different approaches to intervention.

Learning about Evaluation

If you are interested in better understanding the strengths and pit-falls of meta-analysis, Mark Lipsey's work is a fascinating resource. There is also some valuable literature on the relationship between researchers and providers. This link between the academic world and the world of direct service will likely become increasingly important as more funders ask for evidence-based programs. Finally, this section also includes some resources on professional development best practices.

Lipsey, Mark. "Those Confounded Moderators in Meta-Analysis: Good, Bad, and Ugly." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 587. (2003): 69-81. Print.

This article is written for researchers or those who want to look deeper into the complexity of analysis. Lipsey writes about ways that different aspects of meta-analysis can change results.

Myers-Walls, Judith. "An Odd Couple with Promise: Researchers and Practitioners in Evaluation Settings." *Family Relations*. 49.3 (2000): 341-347. Print.

This article looks into the relationship between researchers and providers, while not in a distinctly youth setting, it does give some useful thoughts on how the two groups can better work together and benefit from each other's participation in evaluation.

"Promoting Quality Through Professional Development." *Harvard Family Research Project* 8. (2004): Web. 02 Feb 2010.

Here, Harvard Family Research Project looks at the benefits of professional development for the overall quality of a program. It promotes better-educated, more professional staff in youth services as a way to increase the value of programs and decrease staff turnover.

Rynes, Sara, and D. Brian McNatt. "Bringing the Organization into Organizational Research: An Examination of Academic Research inside Organizations." *Journal of Business and Psychology*. 16.1 (2001): 3-19. Print.

This article examines successful research models where researchers integrate themselves into an organization in order to study how it works. This could be a valuable tool for organizations that are considering an external study of the program.

Hemsley-Brown, Jane, and Caroline Sharp. "The Use of Research to Improve Professional Practice: A Systematic Review of the Literature." *Oxford Review of Education*. 29.4 (2003): 449-470. Print.

This literature review explores research in educational settings. Hemsley-Brown and Sharp focus their study on how teachers use research to improve their teaching techniques.

Zirkel, Perry. "The Professoriate, the Practitioners, and 'Their' Periodicals." *Phi Delta Kappan*. 88.8 (2007): 586-589 . Print.

This article looks at how teachers and professors of education are not accessing the same information or reading the same articles. It is an interesting look at how professors and practitioners can be moving on different tracks.

Klingner, Janette, Maria Elena Arguelles, Marie Tejero Hughes, and Sharon Vaughn. "Examining the Schoolwide "Spread" of Research-Based Practices." *Learning Disability Quarterly*. 24.4 (2001): 221-234. Print.

This study explores how teachers who undergo rigorous professional development training share new ideas with other educators and spread evidence-based practices into the school.

Sfard, Anna. "What Could Be More Practical than Good Research?" *Educational Studies in Mathematics*. 58.3 (2005): 393-413. Print.

This is an executive summary of a survey of mathematics teachers regarding the use of research for improving teaching techniques. It is an interesting look at how practices and ideas spread in a profession.

Rynes, Sara, Jean Bartunek, and Richard Daft. "Across the Great Divide: Knowledge Creation and Transfer between Practitioners and Academics." *Academy of Management Journal*. 44.2 (2001): 340-355. Print.

This forum uses ideas of knowledge creation to explore the differing viewpoints of researchers and practitioners within organizations. The articles in the forum discuss the gap between research and practice and the ways in which ideas do spread between different groups.

Learning from Other Fields

Other fields in youth development gave had positive experiences creating tools for evaluation. While these tools might not be perfectly tailored to youth intervention, they can give us clues into what to look for and what a successful model looks like.

Scholars in a range of fields related to youth intervention have conducted large and small-scale studies that might be of use to someone trying to find ways to improve a program. Some such studies include:

Bridgman, Rae. "I Helped Build That: A Demonstration Employment Training Program for Homeless Youth in Toronto, Canada." *American Anthropologist*. 103.3 (2001): 779-795. Print.

Bridgman provides an anthropological look at a single homeless youth program in Canada. Her in-depth interviews with providers, participants and other stakeholders are valuable examples of how program assessment actually works on the ground. This article shows a different approach to studying a program – showing that not all methods include statistical analysis.

Smith, Charles, Thomas Devaney, Tom Akiva, and Samantha Sugar. "Quality

and accountability in the out-of-school-time sector." *New Directions for Youth Development*. 121. (2009). Print.

This article addresses issues of best practices in OST. Smith and Devaney provide a strong descriptive assessment of the YPQA method.

Bailey, Sandra, and Mary Deen. "Development of a Web-Based Evaluation System: A Tool for Measuring Life Skills in Youth and Family Programs." *Family Relations*. 51.2 (2002): 138-147. Print.

This article gives a detailed description of one way to measure programs using a web-based evaluation, which they argue is easier for providers. The article presents a pilot study of this program.

Shlonsky, Aron, and Jill Duerr Berrick. "Assessing and Promoting Quality in Kin and Nonkin Foster Care." *Social Service Review*. 75.1 (2001): 60-83. Print.

This article looks at the outcomes of different groups of youth in foster care based on kinship to foster parents and other factors. The authors discuss ways to improve the quality of a child's foster care experience based on a variety of measures.

Moore, Laurence, Anna Graham, and Ian Diamond. "On the Feasibility of Conducting Randomised Trials in Education: Case Study of a Sex Education Intervention." *British Educational Research Journal*. 29.5 (2003): 673-689. Print.

This article demonstrates the research technique used to evaluate sex education intervention in England.

Weissberg, Roger, and Mary Utne O'Brien. "What Works in School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Positive Youth Development." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 591. (2004): 86-97. Print.

This article sets out guidelines for integrating academic, social and emotional learning by showing the development of these aspects of school learning and demonstrating how 21st century schools can incorporate them into all areas of school life.

Klingner, Janette, and Patricia Edwards. "Cultural Considerations with Response to Intervention Models." *Reading Research Quarterly*. 41.1 (2006): 108-117. Print.

This article looks at assessment tools for young people with learning disabilities, focusing particular attention on how these tools work for young people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Best Practices in Youth Intervention

Because youth intervention is such a broad field, some distinctions between "youth intervention" and "other fields" can be fairly arbitrary. Depending on the location and nature of your program, the information in this section could be more or less relevant than the information provided above.

Some interesting work in youth intervention includes:

Aos, Steve, Roxanne Lieb, Jim Mayfield, and Marna Miller. "Benefits and Costs of Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Youth." *Washington State Institute for Public Policy*. (2004). Print.

This return on investment report examines the effectiveness of early youth intervention programs in Washington State. It can be a very valuable model for similar work in Minnesota.

Mulford, Carrie, and Richard Redding. "Training the Parents of Juvenile Offenders: State of the Art and Recommendations for Service Delivery." *Ó Springer Science+Business Media* (2007). Web. 02 Feb 2010.

This article discusses techniques for incorporating successful parent training into work with juvenile offenders. It includes a comparative look at how different youth and family characteristics influence the outcome of intervention.

Miller, Jerry, and William Rowe. "Cracking the Black Box: What Makes an Arts Intervention Program Work?" *Best Practices in Mental Health*. 5.1 (2009). Print.

This article looks at the use of arts programming in a youth intervention setting, with a focus on current assessment of outcomes in art-based intervention for at-risk youth.

Carswell, Steven, Thomas Hanlon , Kevin O'Grady, Amy Watts, and Pattarapan Pothong. "A Preventive Intervention Program for Urban African American Youth Attending an Alternative Education Program: Background, Implementation, and Feasibility." *Education and Treatment of Children*. 32.3 (2009). Print.

This article looks at the specific challenges of implementation and outcome assessment for after school intervention programs. The authors focus on these challenges in the context of an alternative education program for urban African American youth. This article reports the results of an outcomes evaluation for a specific intervention program.

Koffman, Stephen, Alice Ray, Sarah Berg, Larry Covington, and Nadine Albarra. "Impact of a Comprehensive Whole Child Intervention and Prevention Program among Youths at Risk of Gang Involvement and Other Forms of Delinquency." *Children & Schools*. 31.4 (2009). Print.

This article looks at the influence that trauma-related mental health issues have upon intervention with delinquent and gang-involved youth.

Breunlin, Douglas, Rocco Cimmarusti, Tara Bryant-Edwards, and Joshua Hetherington. "Conflict Resolution Training as an Alternative to Suspension for Violent Behavior." *Journal of Educational Research*. 95.6 (2002):349-357. Print.

This article assesses the benefits of a specific conflict resolution program that was used to replace suspension for certain cases in a school setting. The authors report an experimental outcomes evaluation, which shows the merits of this program.

Best Practices in Minnesota

Here in Minnesota, we are lucky to be so close to top-level research facility. We can learn from, collaborate with, and even become test subjects for researchers working on many aspects of youth

development and programming. One strong element of this network of researchers is the Center for 4-H Youth Development. The Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time, which comes out of the Center publishes information on a variety of issues like quality assessment and strategic planning. The Youth Works Institute also has an array of quality trainings.

In addition to the University of Minnesota's research, there are also a number of statewide and local organizations that publish useful tools for evaluating best practices. The Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, for example, prints information on delinquency prevention programs and their recommendations to the state for improvement in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention issues.

State agencies, in particular the Minnesota Judicial Branch, have also provided useful publications in the past. Their studies on issues like disproportionate minority confinement have both direct and more distal impacts on the work of youth intervention providers. Statewide task forces have the resources to conduct more in-depth research than a single organization and they can also indicate the direction that state agencies are moving on important issues.

Federal Initiatives

Federal agencies like the Office of Justice Programs and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services produce a large number of documents related to best practices. Like the statewide agencies, these groups can call on resources and researchers that are not available to individual organizations. In a time when many organizations are looking to augment state funding with federal money, know the issues that are important to the federal government (and what their standards are) can be quite valuable.

Conclusion

Feel open to using this document for whatever purposes you might find. It can be used to justify greater emphasis on evaluation, to change current practices, or as the foundation for further research. There are several key ideas, however, that any reader might find useful.

First, not all studies are equally good. We all know that statistics can be warped (intentionally or unintentionally) by bad design or faulty logic. Researchers learn how to spot the pitfalls in new studies, but practitioners also need to know how to sift the good information from the bad. Keeping up to date on methods and breakthroughs in research is a great way to equip yourself against twisted statistics.

Second, there is not one perfect answer to "what are best practices in youth intervention?" There is still a great deal of innovating left to do. We hope that YIPA member programs will be a part of this innovation. YIPA will provide the resource, support and professional development that we can to help this process of evaluation and creation, but ultimately it is up to providers to make changes.

Third, researchers, practitioners, funders, and people from different fields need to communicate. Communication between these groups has been spotty in the past and sometimes even strained. That cannot continue. Each one of these groups holds part of the solution. YIPA wants to support conversation and collaboration in whatever way our members need. Please keep in mind that there are amazing resources out there!