



**BOLD
THINKERS
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IMPACT**

Core Components of Effective Prevention Programs for Youth

Session 5. Synthesis

*Exploring Core Components Research in
Social Service Settings – OPRE Methods
Meeting*

Sandra Jo Wilson

Session Goals



- Share our ASPE-supported work on the core components of effective programs for youth
 - Describe our methodological approach
 - How we use a core components approach to inform practice guidelines
 - Share challenges and limitations
- Put our work in the context of other federal initiatives on evidence and evidence-based practice

Project Background



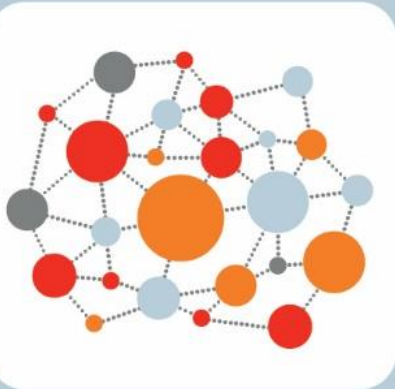
- The project is focused on developing evidence-based practice guidelines for youth programs using a core components approach.
- This approach capitalizes on two things:
 - there is a great deal of well-controlled research available on youth programs *and*
 - program impacts on youth outcomes across these many studies vary quite considerably.

Our Version of Core Components



Information Environment

The vast research on youth programs is difficult to navigate for evidence-based decision-making



Meta-Analysis

Meta-analysis offers a transparent and efficient way to organize evidence



Core Components

Program features that predict positive youth outcomes are identified empirically



Practice Guidelines

Core components are translated into accessible and actionable guidance for improving practice



Rationale



- Meta-analyses of impact evaluations find that, on average, programs for children and youth produce significant, positive effects on a number of beneficial outcomes
- For almost all outcomes, however, the program effects exhibit substantial variability around the mean value
- The sources of this variability are likely both methodological and substantive
- Analysis provides a methodical and rigorous way to comb through the data to identify the characteristics of the studies, interventions, and participants associated with better outcomes

Conceptual Framework



- Based on Weiss, Bloom, & Brock's (2013) framework for studying sources of variation in program effects
- Sources of Treatment Effects Variability
 - Study Methods (research design, measurement features, role of researchers)
 - **Content, Quantity, Quality, Conveyance of the Interventions**
 - Client Characteristics
 - **Implementation (planning and support for, quality, research context)**

Meta-Regression Analysis



- Selecting an outcome
- Potential core components
 - Program content
 - Program structure (quantity, quality, conveyance)
 - Implementation strategies and problems
 - Participant characteristics
- Analysis focuses on components that are important across all programs that target our outcome and components that are unique to different approaches to behavior change

For example...



Model for Skill-Building Programs	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Specific Core Components</i>	b (se)	b (se)
Intercept	0.14 (0.09)	0.12 (0.10)
Delivery by specialist staff (vs. all others)	0.51 (0.12)	0.46 (0.12)
Lesson-plan program	0.13 (0.10)	0.13 (0.10)
Content element: Conflict resolution skills	0.26 (0.12)	0.29 (0.12)
Content element: Any family/parenting element	-0.41 (0.14)	-0.11 (0.19)
<i>General Core Components</i>		
Implementation: Explicit or suggested problems		-0.25 (0.10)
Program complexity score		-0.09 (0.06)
Provider training or supervision		0.07 (0.09)

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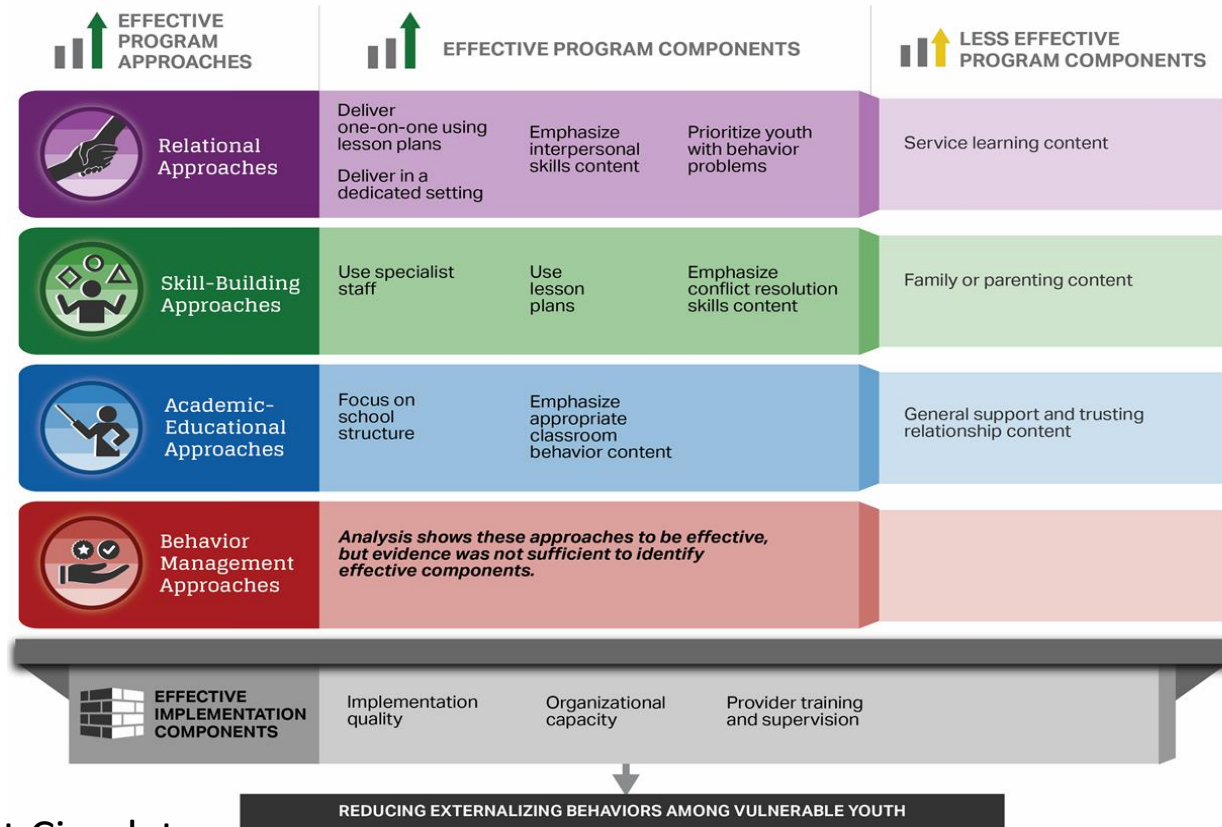
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Moving from analysis to application

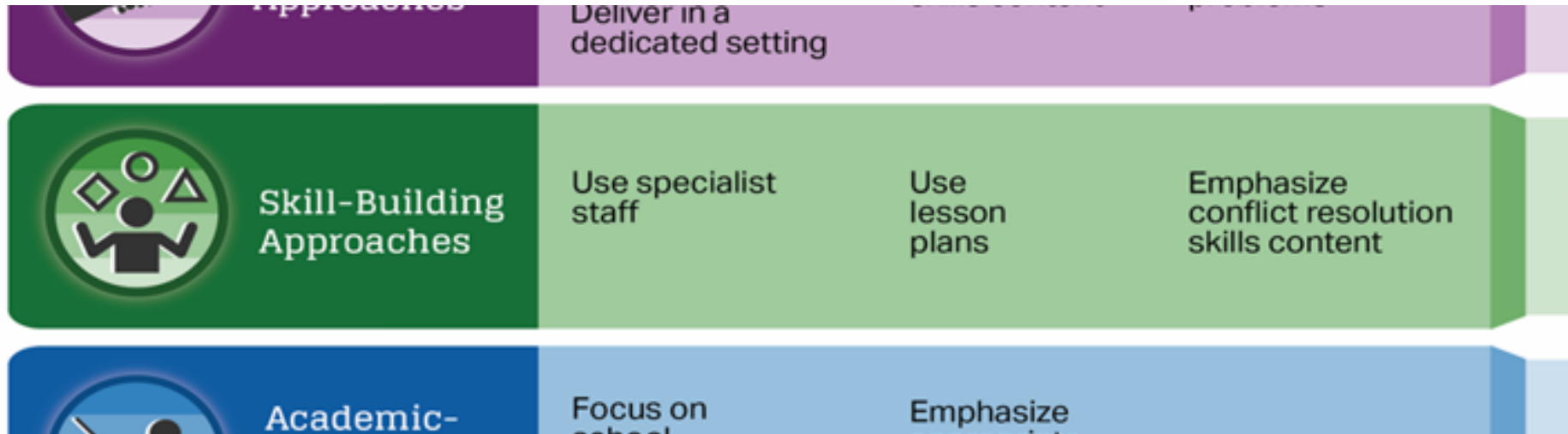


- Analysis focuses on components that are associated with better outcomes
 - Programs that do “X” have better outcomes than programs that don’t
- The Practice Guidelines aim to help program administrators think about what they’re doing now and whether and how their current practices align with the evidence
 - Any practices that are not aligned with the evidence can then be the focus of improvement efforts

Recommendations for Programs Targeting Externalizing Behavior Problems



Recommendations for Programs Targeting Externalizing Behavior Problems



RECOMMENDATION 2

Teach from dedicated lesson plans

ASSESS
FEASIBILITY



- **Delivery model.** Determine whether, or to what extent, your program draws on a manualized or lesson-plan based service delivery model. Is typical delivery close enough to the manual to say you are providing “that” program?
- **Program content.** Identify all program content and pedagogy that you do not have documented in writing. To what extent could you standardize and systematize program delivery?
- **Understanding of the program.** Review your staff training materials and process. Do all staff members understand your program’s theory of change, rationale, key content, and areas where adaptation are allowed?

RECOMMENDATION 2

Teach from dedicated lesson plans

TAKE
ACTION



Consider the following courses of action depending on the results of your assessment:

- Write down/document the key components, activities, content and learning objectives for your program as a way to manualize your program. Include how you think the program should be taught and how it is actually delivered by staff.
- Crosswalk your program delivery with your program's theory of change. Revise delivery as needed to ensure you are following the philosophy and assumptions that you believe will reduce externalizing behaviors.
- Determine what adaptations facilitators can make without affecting the program theory.

For example, you may determine that role playing is integral to your program, but that facilitators can vary the specific examples based on participants.

- Train facilitators in the documented program, ensuring they understand the underlying theory of change, and monitor their fidelity to the manual. Schedule booster sessions for experienced facilitators.
- Emphasize the importance of consistent use of your standardized lesson plans across facilitators, cohorts, and over time so that every program participant receives largely the same intervention.

Challenges and Limitations



- Missingness, idiosyncracies, and inconsistencies in reporting of study characteristics
- Volume of research required
- Confounding
 - Correlated substantive moderators
 - Methods confounds

Supporting/Promoting Core Components



- Practitioners and program administrators really like the flexibility, modularity, and continuous improvement focus, but
 - technical assistance might be required
- Reporting quality and consistency
- Registries and clearinghouses are an untapped resource for core components work
- Grantmaking

Contact

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