This study investigated the outcomes of a yearlong formal curriculum-mentoring project sponsored by the American Occupational Therapy Foundation. Five occupational therapy faculty groups were selected through a competitive application process and paired with mentors to assist in curriculum change. The experiences of each of the teams were studied using multiple methods of data collection, including semistructured interviews conducted in person and via telephone, a mailed questionnaire, and bimonthly electronic journal entries. The process and outcomes of two representative cases are reported in this qualitative, critical case study analysis. Overall, the faculty groups in each of the two teams seemed to benefit from mentoring in differing degrees as a result of their participation in this curriculum mentoring project. An important finding was that a well-focused mentoring plan with clearly outlined expectations needs to be established at the onset of any formal mentoring project. Additionally, a systematic, strategic plan agreed on by both mentors and participants, with a clear outline of responsibilities, will enhance the outcomes of a mentoring relationship.


Introduction

Occupational therapy educators nationwide have begun the process of curriculum reform for several reasons. First, the main desire of occupational therapy educational programs is to prepare graduates who can meet the occupational wants and needs of persons receiving occupational therapy services. Second, more pragmatically, programs are changing curricula due to Resolution J, passed in 1999 by the Representative Assembly of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), which mandates that all occupational therapy programs move to master’s-degree-level entry by 2007 (AOTA, 1999). Curriculum change presents both challenges and opportunities to occupational therapy educators. Although the academic environment can be collegial, work is often done in isolation. Faculty members in occupational therapy programs have varying levels of expertise related to curriculum design or program development. In an effort to assist faculty members in their efforts, the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF) created and implemented the Curriculum Mentoring Project. The purpose of this study was to determine the experiences of the participants and mentors involved in AOTF’s Curriculum Mentoring Project and was done as a pilot effort to determine whether the use of mentors is an effective mechanism to support occupational therapy programs’ move to master’s-degree-level entry. The research questions were the following:

1. How does an assigned formal mentor affect an occupational therapy faculty’s efforts to achieve curriculum reform?
2. To what extent do faculty members experience the outcomes of curriculum change because of the process of mentoring?

Literature Review

In the health care and higher education literature, a significant amount of information is devoted to mentoring. A review of this literature can aid the reader in...
better understanding the concept of mentoring, including a historical overview, definitions of mentor and protégé, and theoretical models of mentoring (Provident, 2005). Within the field of occupational therapy, the importance of mentoring has been consistently emphasized within the literature (Rogers, 1987; Schemm & Bross, 1995; Vassantachart & Rice, 1997). Vassantachart & Rice (1997) suggested development of mentoring programs as a potential tool for faculty development. More recently, the role of mentoring on research productivity among junior faculty members in the field of occupational therapy has been studied (Paul, Stein, Ottenbacher, & Liu, 2002). The results of this survey support a positive effect of mentoring on research productivity among junior faculty members in occupational therapy. The average duration of the mentoring relationship was 3.5 years, and it was concluded that formal mentoring systems can be an asset to the occupational therapy profession.

Curriculum Reform in Allied Health Education

Although there are no models in the literature related to using a mentor to guide or assist with curriculum reform in allied health-care higher education, a few descriptions of curriculum reform efforts in nursing and medical education do exist. Bloomfield and Bligh (1997) described a study that examined aspects of a team role in the management of curriculum change at the University Medical Education Unit at the Medical School in Liverpool, England. This study's results suggested that those closely involved in curriculum change should be aware of the roles that individual members of their team can play. These authors proposed that the ways in which these individuals interact may make the crucial difference between success and failure of the curriculum reform efforts.

The process of curriculum change in the nursing school at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, was described by Mawn and Reece (2000). They sought to provide a case example of the process of change from an integrated acute-care-focused nursing curriculum to a community-based health promotion framework. The methods these authors found to facilitate curriculum revision included: designing and refining a curriculum template, revisiting values, releasing “sacred cows,” and building consensus. Mawn and Reece concluded that no one strategy will meet the needs of all schools undergoing curriculum reform; however, the most important tasks of faculty members are the need to conduct dialogues, share the process of change, and carefully evaluate curricular endeavors.

Curriculum Reform in Occupational Therapy

There is little in the occupational therapy literature to guide educators during efforts to reform their curricula. The only article that I found is a description of a 3-year project of curricular renaissance undertaken by the faculty in the occupational therapy department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Wood et al., 1999). The faculty members reported that their curriculum reform efforts depended on adherence to a systematic process of development that encompassed three domains of activity: environmental scanning and analysis, creation of a vision, and curriculum planning. They adhered to a rigorous schedule devoted to full faculty work specific to curricular assignments. Their conclusions were that the consistency of a schedule focused on curriculum, as well as the designation of one person as the process manager, allowed them to remain energized and focused on their curriculum reform. They believed that their collective visioning process and 3 years of sustained effort resulted in a rich, exciting curriculum, beyond their initial expectations.

Background of the Project

The seeds of the Curriculum Mentoring Project were planted as far back as 1982, when an ad hoc AOTF committee, at the request of AOTA’s Representative Assembly, developed a set of research competencies for occupational therapists (Gillette, 2001). These competencies outlined behavioral objectives and specific research skills that occupational therapy practitioners should possess. The competencies were revised in 1998 and partially integrated into the revised Standards for an Accredited Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist (referred to hereafter as the Standards) (AOTA, 1998). In 1998, the AOTF recognized a need to support faculty members who were redesigning their curricula to meet the new Standards and who were committed to enhancing scholarship in their programs. During that time, faculty members at a well-respected occupational therapy program who had significantly revised their curriculum expressed interest in sharing their expertise. A dialogue ensued and led to the idea of using mentors to assist other programs in their efforts. This idea was formalized in AOTF’s Curriculum Mentoring Project. The overall goals of the Curriculum Mentoring Project were the following:

1. Engage faculty groups in an iterative process of formal instruction, independent faculty work, and on-site consultation in curriculum design.
2. Shepherd participating faculty groups through the development or refinement of graduate education programs.
3. Foster graduate educational programs that will produce clinician-scholars who can work autonomously across practice environments as colleagues in service delivery and research with a variety of interdisciplinary profes-
The curriculum mentoring project occurred between October 2000 and June 2002, and was divided into five phases: (a) application phase, (b) workshop phase, (c) interim work phase, (d) on-site consultation phase, and (e) project completion.

Research Design

Faculty Participants

In response to the announcement of the project, nine applications were received from occupational therapy programs across the United States; seven from baccalaureate programs making the transition to master's level and two from entry-level master's programs seeking assistance in refining their graduate curricula. Of the nine applicants, five program participants were ultimately chosen and were composed of faculty representatives from their respective occupational therapy academic programs. These faculty groups ranged from 2 to 6 people.

Mentors

The mentors for the curriculum mentoring project were selected from AOTF’s network of individuals who have interests in curriculum design and program development. The mentors were recruited from this network through chain sampling, the identification of people from those who know them and have knowledge of their skill areas (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A number of potential mentors were identified and seven agreed to be part of this project. Each of the mentors was committed to furthering the development of occupational therapy education and undertook this project as a service activity. They were not compensated for their participation.

Each faculty group was then matched with a mentor, or pair of mentors, based on several factors, including the academic environment; the goals and interests that were identified by the program faculty; the interests, skills, and abilities of each mentor; and the mentors’ potential to help the program participants achieve their goals. The mentors discussed these various factors and then determined each mentor–program match based on their perception of goodness of fit. Each of the five matched faculty groups and mentors are outlined in Table 1 with fictitious names to help the reader remember the location and type of university setting.

Critical-Case Study

In critical-case design, a researcher studies a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition, and chooses some number of cases, which represent the overall outcome (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Table 1. Overview of Faculty and Mentor Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Participants</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEAM 1 Southeast State University</strong></td>
<td>Mentor A—Veteran educator with doctorate, numerous publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants in Project: 5 of 24</td>
<td>Mentor B—Clinical Associate Professor, professional leadership positions at both the state and national levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal: continue to strengthen their entry-level master’s program and enhance faculty development in scholarship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEAM 2 Midwest Private University</strong></td>
<td>Mentor C—Clinical Associate Professor and Program Director in occupational therapy department that recently underwent curriculum reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants in Project: 5 of 8</td>
<td>Mentor D—Pursuing a doctoral degree beginning to establish her research career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal: establish a new Bachelor of Science in Occupational Science (BSOS) degree and a new entry-level Master of Occupational Therapy Degree (MOT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEAM 3 Northeast Branch University</strong></td>
<td>Mentor E—Assistant Program Chair with a doctorate; has performed research related to occupational therapy curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants in Project: 3 of 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal: move from a traditional medically based entry-level master’s-degree program to one more occupation based.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEAM 4 New England Research University</strong></td>
<td>Mentor G—Educator and former Program Director with doctorate and numerous publications. Firsthand experience with curriculum reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants in Project: 6 of 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal: further develop their proposed, newly forming, entry-level master’s degree program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEAM 5 Deep South Branch University</strong></td>
<td>Mentor B—Clinical Associate Professor; professional leadership positions at both the state and national levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants in Project: 2 of 2</td>
<td>Mentor F—Former educator and presently a Director of Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal: redesign their bachelor’s degree program to an entry-level master’s degree program with an occupational science focus</td>
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By studying multiple cases and reporting the critical cases, it is believed that the understanding gained will be greater than if only a single case were studied. A case, for this study, includes the group of faculty participants from one of the universities selected to participate in the AOTF Curriculum Mentoring Project and the mentor or mentor pair assigned to work with them. In this research, the results of two of the five single cases were analyzed, synthesized, and compared to each another to create a critical-case study design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The two cases were selected based on the following criteria: (a) a representation of single and dual mentors; (b) representation of public, private, and research university types; and (c) size and experience of the faculty. From this list of inclusion criteria, Case One—Team II (“Midwest Private University”) and Case Two—Team IV (“New England Research University”) were chosen as the critical cases for this study.

Data and Data Sources

Applications and Initial Interviews

For this research study, data were collected in a variety of ways throughout the entire project. First, each of the applications to the AOTF Curriculum Mentoring Project was reviewed. Then, a semistructured interview was developed and administered to all mentors and faculty participants before the start of the weekend workshop. The purpose of this interview was to learn about the overall goals of each faculty group and mentor, and to elicit their impressions of how they thought the year would proceed.

Reflection Questions

Throughout the yearlong project, supplemental reflection questions were sent bimonthly via e-mail to all mentors and participants. The purpose of these questions was to elicit feedback on the work that was being completed during the interim work phase. These prompts were designed to facilitate participants’ reflections on the overall process of curriculum reform. Questions focused on any interactions the mentors and faculty may have had with each other related to their work on curriculum change.

Questionnaire

A midpoint open-ended questionnaire was developed in a “mentor version” and “faculty participant version,” and was sent to all participants in February 2002. The purpose of the midpoint questionnaire was to gather perspectives from the study participants on their work in the project up to that point. Questions were designed to gather data in four areas: Curriculum Change and Graduate Education, Faculty Participation, Mentor Influence, and Future Planning.

Final Group Telephone Interview

At the end of the formal project, open-ended telephone interviews were conducted. Each faculty team was interviewed as a group. The mentors were interviewed individually or as a pair (depending on the program). The purpose of the telephone interview was to gather information in four important areas: (a) overall impressions of the AOTF Curriculum Mentoring Project; (b) impressions of working with or as the mentor; (c) impressions of the work accomplished with or as a faculty team; and (d) recommendations for the AOTF Curriculum Mentoring Project, if it was to be offered again. Each source of data is summarized in Table 2 and is presented in the order in which it was collected.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, a basic issue related to qualitative research, refers to the methods used to ensure rigor within the design (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Credibility refers to the outsider’s perception that the research findings are accurate to the situation as described (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One technique used in this study to ensure trustworthiness involved triangulation of the data. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources and methods to ensure that the data are accurate. As previously described, various sources of data were gathered at multiple points over the course of the project; therefore, each case report was based on several sources of data gathered through a variety of techniques. As a way to ensure credibility, an external reader reviewed all applications and initial interview transcripts. She was provided the guiding research questions and then independently reviewed each program’s application and set of interview transcripts. The external reader and I met biweekly during the initial stages of analysis to discuss the findings of each case based on the research questions. Transferability refers to the reader’s decision whether to apply the findings of this study to his or her unique setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I have attempted to describe the settings and participants in adequate detail to allow the reader to envision the setting, events, and processes that transpired.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Data Collection Schedule</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2001</td>
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<td>July 2001</td>
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<td>September 2001</td>
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<td>November 2001</td>
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<td>February 2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2002</td>
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Analysis

The results for each of the two cases are first presented separately and then are synthesized to address the research questions that guided this inquiry. The initial content analysis of these two cases yielded 27 codes, which were collapsed into 6 major thematic categories:

1. Contextual factors that contributed to the experience
2. Aspects of the mentor that contributed to the experience
3. Aspects of the faculty that contributed to the experience
4. Relationship between mentor(s) and faculty
5. AOTF’s Curriculum Mentoring Project
6. Overall outcomes related to the project

Case One

Team II—“Midwest Private University”

This occupational therapy program was located in a Research Level II, private, nonprofit university under Jesuit auspices. This faculty group had begun the process of phasing out their existing Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy (BSO) degree by 2004 and planned to establish a new Bachelor of Science in Occupational Science (BSOS) degree and a new entry-level Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) degree by 2005. (Author’s Update: As of June 2006, the new degrees had been established.) Within the application submitted to AOTF’s Curriculum Mentoring program, the faculty articulated a goal to establish a combined baccalaureate and entry-level master’s degree program in which occupation is the central organizing framework of the undergraduate program. It was evident from the application packet that the faculty was highly motivated to pursue this project.

Contextual Factors Related to the University Setting

During the year, this faculty group was working within a context of significant environmental change. Major budget cuts reduced faculty contracts from 12 months to 10 months, the number of students enrolled in the occupational therapy program dropped, and school leadership changed as a new dean was hired. These changes put a great deal of pressure on the faculty to work on the curriculum and carry out their faculty roles in a shorter period of time.

Two mentors were paired with this faculty group: Mentor C, a Clinical Associate Professor and Program Director in a large occupational therapy program, who had led the curricular revision at her institution; and Mentor D, who completed her doctoral degree in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education during the course of this study.

Aspects of Mentors That Contributed to the Experience

One finding that emerged quite strongly from the data was that certain qualities and behaviors of the mentors were important to the process. In the case of these two mentors, the most influential factors were: (a) the mentors’ knowledge of curriculum as situated within the university context, (b) the mentors’ ability to carry out the role, and (c) the mentoring experience.

These two mentors had an astute awareness of the importance of linking the curriculum design to the philosophy of the institution. Throughout the year, the mentors reminded the faculty about the importance of considering the Jesuit mission of the university as it related to curriculum design. These two mentors also shared a sophisticated knowledge of curriculum and anticipated what the faculty group would need to consider in their work through the year as well as when they should challenge the group. The skill of knowing when to challenge the group being mentored was evident, by journal entries and by the level of questions asked by participants.

Introductory letter. The mentors also formally introduced themselves via letter before the New Hampshire workshop. The letter included a brief introduction about the mentors, including their individual strengths and collective working strategy. The mentors knew that only a representative group of the faculty would be present at the workshop; therefore, this gesture served to establish a relationship with the entire faculty.

Development of strategic plan. During the weekend workshop, the mentors assisted the faculty in developing a strategic curriculum-development plan for the next 5 years. As one mentor said:

We loosely mapped out a plan involving their primary foci and their tracking issues over the next 5 years. Their primary foci for 2001–02 will be [to plan] the freshman and sophomore courses of the new curriculum, finalize their mission and vision, complete the next drafts of their curricular themes and framework, and establish recruitment initiatives. Their tracking issues will be to monitor the changes within the college, network with non–health faculty, [and] continue to nurture and develop community links for their applied experiences. So basically I think they left with a clearer, more relaxed view of how the curriculum would be a 5-year plan, not an everything-by-this-fall plan. They seemed to be clearer on what were the immediate and not so immediate issues, and on what structures they needed to put in place to accomplish it all. We left it open in terms of when they would like to have us visit and for what reasons. (Mentor D)

It was clear that the mentors had been helpful to the faculty participants in assisting with this plan, as evidenced by faculty members’ reflective journal entries:

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The mentors did an excellent job of keeping us focused on our goals for the weekend, which was to achieve a short-range 1-year plan and a long-range 5-year plan, which is the length of our new BS/OS MOT program. This included goals and activities to match, which was very helpful. Though it may have not been that different from what our thought had been before we came, we had not put them down in a plan format. This was extremely helpful, as it will help our focus and direction, despite all the chaos that continues in our academic environment.

(Provident, 2004, p. 2)

The short- and long-term strategy building was one of the most helpful components of the meeting. We knew ahead of time generally what was ahead with regard to the need for curriculum development; however, the objective, specific guidance for the development of a 1-, 2-, and 5-year plan was invaluable. This allowed us to benefit from the experience of the mentors regarding what could be realistically implemented within those time periods— it is our responsibility to enable a “fit” of this model with our context. (Provident, 2004, p. 4)

Mentors’ knowledge of their style or role. It was also evident that the mentors spent time thinking about their style and how to be effective in carrying out their mentor role. One of the main issues that emerged had to do with negotiating the mentor relationship via long distance.

In addition to attending to the faculty group’s needs and priorities, these mentors frequently discussed their experiences working together. Because these mentors had already worked together and requested to work together for this project, their relationship was established to a certain degree. However, they had not worked together as a team to mentor a faculty group, so they also recognized the importance of working through a number of issues during the year.

Mentors’ delineation of separate roles. One of their first tasks involved planning how to delineate their roles to ensure that the faculty group felt comfortable with having two mentors.

We needed to talk about that and decide how to have a common . . . sort of front, yet allow [faculty members] to use us both individually, because we’re different, and yet kind of keep a cohesive approach. And . . . how to keep things relatively cohesive as much as we could. (Mentor C)

Mentor professional development. As the two mentors worked through the year, each commented on the benefit of having the other to process faculty comments and to look at things from another perspective. Both seemed to concur that the co-mentoring experience was beneficial. It also became obvious from their reflective journal entries that this was a planned opportunity for professional development for Mentor D, who was more junior at the start of the AOTF Curriculum Mentoring Project.

I anticipate that as our work unfolds that [Mentor D] and I will switch roles, with her assuming “lead” role once the faculty is comfortable with their approach to their work and begins to dig more into the content of their curriculum. [Mentor D] is much stronger than I am in the literature on curriculum development and adult learning and has a more scholarly approach than I to her understanding of occupational science. (Mentor C)

Aspects of Faculty That Contributed to the Experience

Another theme area that emerged from the data was the aspects of the faculty group that contributed to the experience. Particular to the faculty in Team II were two separate areas: (a) their work on curriculum and subsequent curriculum outcomes, and (b) the characteristics and style of their work.

Prior work on curriculum. Before the project began, these faculty members had spent about 8 months immersed in the process of curriculum design. They had already decided as a faculty to discontinue their BSOT degree and were seeking approval to establish both a new BSOS degree and an entry-level MOT degree to be awarded in 2006. In their application to the project, they included an overview of the proposed content and sequence for both the BSOS and MOT degrees. The faculty seemed to have a clear idea of what they wanted to accomplish with the mentors; that is, they sought to make a paradigm shift from a strictly undergraduate occupational therapy curriculum to a more innovative “occupational science” bachelor’s degree. The faculty members were hopeful that the mentors would provide an external perspective to their work, yet they seemed to feel vulnerable as they realized and acknowledged that they would have to be honest in revealing fears and weaknesses about their collective understanding of this new body of knowledge to each other and their mentors. However, the faculty also seemed to understand that this forthright approach would facilitate their progress.

There is a certain amount of honesty that is required in admission of where your fears are, where your weaknesses are, and that makes sense. You have to feel like you can do that so you can move on. (Provident, 2004, p. 3)

Throughout the year, the mentors served as role models as they questioned the faculty members about issues related to the proposed new degrees. They also challenged the faculty to continually compare the intellectual rigor and pragmatic course design of the MOT degree to the BSOS degree, so that the faculty would discuss the rationale of why they made particular decisions about the curriculum.

Faculty maturation. Eventually faculty members began to pose concerns and questions independent of the mentors. This developmental step resulted in their growth and maturation as curriculum designers and in the production
of draft documents that were sent to the mentors several times for feedback. The productivity of the faculty was clearly evident because, by the end of the project year, the faculty had developed several important documents: (a) a newly designed vision and mission statements; (b) an educational curriculum design with curricular themes linked with the Jesuit philosophy; (c) a conceptual model that schematically illustrated the vision, mission, and curricular themes; (d) course descriptions and beginning course syllabi for seven undergraduate occupational science courses; (e) a beginning framework for the MOT degree; and (f) an online database used to store more than 175 references, to be used by faculty in support of teaching these new courses. This represented a great deal of work in a relatively short period of time.

Systematic work schedule. Several journal entries revealed that, at the beginning of the project, faculty members met consistently every week and then modified their schedule and met every 2 weeks. Faculty also mentioned that they divided into subgroups to work on separate elements of the curriculum and then came back together in their biweekly meetings to report on their progress. Faculty members reported that they felt a heightened “anxiety” to stay on task and work toward the timeline established at the workshop with the mentors.

Relationship Between Mentors and Faculty

The faculty members and mentors in Team II seemed to feel a mutual respect. In separate journal entries, several faculty commented on the level of preparedness that the mentors had in understanding their proposed curriculum and their demonstrated investment in the process of working with them. The mentors wrote in their journals about the faculty’s knowledge of their (the mentors’) publications and professional work.

Quite honestly, one of the most important factors of this fit is that this faculty group has read everything [we] have written and they really like our work. It is easy to step into a situation where before you even get there, the group “knows” you and wants to learn from you. (Mentor C)

The relationship between the faculty group and mentors was described as “comfortable,” “collegial,” “straightforward,” “positive,” “professional,” “mutually engaging,” and “consisting of good dialogue.” The faculty as a whole seemed to believe that every contact with the mentors provided them with insights, reinforcement, or redirection. By the end of the AOTF curriculum-mentoring year, the faculty members and mentors felt respected and proud of their accomplishments, and the mentors planned to continue their availability to the faculty through conference calls and e-mail even though the formal project had ended.

Findings Related to the Project Structure

It appears as if the project met a professional development need within the faculty, and that it was seen as sophisticated and one in which this faculty felt a sense of pride and honor to have been chosen, based on journal entries and comments during the final telephone interview. The AOTF project provided support to the entire faculty group and individual faculty members. The opportunity to participate in this project was particularly appreciated by the faculty of the Midwest Private University at a time when morale seemed to be low.

Although the initial workshop in New Hampshire gave the faculty group and mentors opportunities to meet and work together, several issues arose related to how time was spent during the 1-1/2 days. The faculty members commented that they believed it would have been helpful for the mentors to have met all faculty rather than just the representatives who were able to attend the workshop. The timing of the workshop was also a concern. Because the workshop was held in June and these faculty members are on 10-month contracts (September–June), 3 months passed between the end of the workshop and the beginning of the fall semester when all the faculty were again available to meet and reestablish their curriculum work routine.

Overall Outcomes Related to the Project

Both the faculty and mentors of Team II seemed to be satisfied with their efforts in the project. The faculty attributed much of the clarity and richness of the work they accomplished to the mentors having challenged them to think and discuss values and curriculum philosophy at deeper and more sophisticated levels than they had in the past. The mentors believed that they helped the faculty embrace where they were in their own professional development and facilitated discussion about what constitutes graduate education.

Overall, the efforts of the two mentors and the faculty of Team II, over the 1 year of the Curriculum Mentoring Project, seemed to result in a positive outcome. One of the main outcomes for this team included the obvious professional development of the faculty as evidenced by higher-level processing on the part of the faculty, and a move from mentor-generated to self-generated questions and dialogue related to the curriculum. Throughout the year, the faculty remained committed to the process despite significant environmental challenges and ended the year with a sense of faculty ownership of the curriculum and their planned revisions. With the assistance of the mentors, the faculty group embedded a link to the context and mission of the university within the curriculum. Additional tangible evidence,
which resulted from the mentoring process, included six significant documents related to their newly designed curriculum. The mentoring relationship of Team II remained positive throughout their 1 year of continuous, systematic, exchanges through various modes of communication. A summary of the findings of Case One is provided in Table 3.

Case Two

Team IV—“New England Research University”

This occupational therapy program is located within a public Research I Institution in New England. The teaching faculty consists of 11 full-time positions and several additional part-time or adjunct faculty. Many faculty members in this program are quite senior; many of the tenured or tenure-track faculty have published widely in areas of occupational therapy treatment and education. Before applying to the Curriculum Mentoring Project, the faculty had worked for about 3 years to create a new curriculum. In 1997, faculty members began reexamining their curriculum in anticipation of the change to an entry-level master’s degree. They described a process of reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the occupational therapy program, discussed the philosophy, and identified curricular themes that they compared to the new Standards. This faculty group used consultants both formally and informally to assist their process. Within their application to the Curriculum Mentoring Project, they included their revised curriculum design, objectives, and an outline of all new courses complete with syllabi. The six representatives from this faculty group were seeking input from a mentor who would help them enhance this newly developed entry-level master’s program. This occupational therapy faculty stated in their application that they were looking for a contemporary “occupation-based” theoretical framework for their curriculum.

Table 3. Case One: Summary of Findings for “Midwest Private University”

| Number of Participants in Project: 5 of 8 |
| Goal: establish a new Bachelor of Science in Occupational Science (BSOS) degree and a new entry-level Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) degree |
| Mentor C—Clinical Associate Professor and Program Director in occupational therapy department that recently underwent curriculum reform. |
| Mentor D—Pursuing a doctoral degree; beginning to establish her research career |

| Themes |
| Mentor | Faculty | Context | Relationship | AOTF Structure | Overall Outcomes |
| Mentor’s knowledge of curriculum as situated within the university context | Spent 8 months prior immersed in curriculum design | Budget cuts reduced from 12-month to 10-month contracts | Mutual respect | Faculty members proud of being selected, seen as prestigious | Newly designed vision and mission statements |
| Sent introductory letter before workshop | Had clear idea of what they wanted to accomplish | Drop in student enrollment | Preparedness of mentors | Suggested all faculty attend rather than just representatives | Educational curriculum design with curricular themes linked with the Jesuit philosophy |
| Assisted with development of 5-year strategic plan at weekend workshop | Faculty matured and began to pose concerns and questions independent of mentors | New dean hired with new agenda | Seen as an opportunity for professional development | Suggested change of initial workshop to September rather than June | Conceptual model that schematically illustrated the vision, mission, and curricular themes |
| Mentors spent time thinking and talking together about experiences and about how to maintain a long-distance relationship | Developed a systematic work schedule | Research, Level II, Private University: Priorities—teaching with some scholarship expectations | “comfortable” “collegial” “straightforward” “positive” “professional” “mutually engaging” | Increased morale of the faculty | Course descriptions and beginning course syllabi for seven undergraduate occupational science courses |
| Mentor challenged faculty to discuss rationale for proposed change | Expected new curriculum: BSOS by 2004 and MOT by 2005 | Faculty familiar with mentor publications | | | Beginning framework for the MOT degree |
| Mentors delineated separate roles | Jesuit auspices | Continued consultation offered | | | Online database that stored a library of more than 175 references |

Note. AOTF = American Occupational Therapy Foundation.
Contextual Factors Related to the University Setting

During the year, New England Research University was going through major changes. Expectations for research productivity were being raised across the university and the administration was in the midst of position changes, one of which was a new dean for Health Sciences. In addition, this faculty had recently lost a faculty member and, because of a hiring freeze, could not fill the 11th faculty position. They also had been relocated to a new building, which significantly altered their physical proximity to one another. In the words of one faculty member:

We no longer have a community conference area that is dedicated to the occupational therapy faculty. Therefore, simple things like sharing a space to have lunch together and other informal gatherings are no longer routinely occurring.

The mentor assigned to this faculty, Mentor G, was a professor of occupational therapy and former program director of an academic department that had gone through extensive curriculum reform. She had many years of experience as both an educator and researcher and had published in the area of pediatrics and curriculum reform.

Aspects of the Mentor That Contributed to the Experience

This mentor articulated a feeling of vagueness about her role during the initial interview in New Hampshire. She articulated that she should be well prepared to anticipate this faculty group's needs because she had firsthand experience of significant curriculum reform within her own occupational therapy program. She stated that she was looking forward to the mentoring process as an opportunity to more deeply reflect on curriculum reform and, as the year progressed, she planned to take on a listening and facilitative role.

“Vagueness” of mentoring role. Throughout the year, Mentor G commented several times, in her journal, that it was her belief that the energy for this mentoring relationship needed to be initiated by the faculty members. She seemed to believe that no one from the outside could effectively step in and make suggestions for curriculum change.

In the words of the mentor:

I am very vague about what I’m doing. But I really think that is OK because I think that when I reflect on our curriculum development change it had to come from within the faculty with a driving passion. There was nobody who could have come from outside and started with “You should” or “You could.” Although “You might try” suggestions for reading, or suggestions for discussion topics, were the sorts of things [that] helped. . . . But suggestions aren’t enough; it [the motivation] really has to come from the faculty. And I feel like, well, this may work or it may not work, I may not have all the right suggestions, so that is the vagueness of it.

Three of the faculty members expressed confidence in the mentor’s skills, in journal entries written after the initial meeting in New Hampshire. The three faculty participants expressed that although she had a quiet manner, when Mentor G offered information, she challenged the faculty members to think differently about their curriculum. However, as the year progressed, it was apparent that there was minimal contact between the faculty group and mentor. Both the faculty and mentor referred to the relative “disconnect” in the relationship and indicated that although each was searching for potential opportunities to connect, they found few. In the words of one faculty member in a journal entry: “I have not had any contact with our mentor at all since the weekend session” (Provident, 2004, p. 4).

Other faculty members wrote the following:

We are finally back at school and beginning to recapture our mentorship workshop experience. We have several groups working on issues related to the workshop (e.g., focusing on occupation in the pre-professional part of the program). I think we are all focused on the tasks ahead of us that remain before we start the new courses next year—but we know what they are and what we need to do to get them accomplished. I am not sure how we will use [Mentor G’s] expertise . . . and this journal prompts in me a need to think about that and how her expertise could continue to assist us. (Provident, 2004, p. 3)

It seems that our work with the mentor is really done. When we were together, she helped us see things a little differently, and provided some encouragement. Now it seems that it is up to us to take what we learned as a faculty and decide what [to do with] and how we would like to use that information. (Provident, 2004, p. 6)

Awareness of faculty group. According to Mentor G, this faculty group of 11 appeared to be divided into a senior and junior faculty. Many of the senior faculty members were well established in their academic careers with clear expertise in teaching and publications. The senior faculty seemed to have less investment in this mentoring relationship for the purposes of curriculum reform. The junior faculty members, on the other hand, seemed to be very excited about the prospect of changing the curriculum and establishing their own research agenda. It became apparent to the mentor, after the on-site visit, that the primary goal of this faculty group was to obtain guidance in becoming a working “community of scholars” rather than achieving curriculum reform. In her final interview, Mentor G observed that the faculty seemed to function as individual professionals, delegating various tasks within the curriculum to key personnel. However, Mentor G also indicated that one entire
day of the on-site visit was committed to the issue of community-building and supporting the needs of the different members. Mentor G stated that if this need had been apparent to her earlier, she would have tried harder to facilitate this faculty toward a more collaborative community-building experience. It is important to note that the on-site visit for this team occurred in May (11 months into the project). Mentor G stated a feeling of “missing the boat” on the real interest of the faculty for this project. In her words, when reflecting about the on-site visit:

In a matter of probably half a day last week, [the faculty members] resolved some of the questions relative to the undergraduate curriculum, but the majority of the next day really was committed to that issue of community, what they had in common and the needs of the different members. I’m wondering now too, leafing through their application again, if their application wasn’t more towards trying to figure out how they are going to work together as a community of scholars and much less towards the curriculum. I really believe . . . . [P]art of the issue that they identified for me is that they have several faculty in senior roles. And you know, as we talked about it, you’ve got some junior people that are very excited [and who] really tried to establish a research program. And very senior people that are looking at a horizon that’s a few years down the line, but you know they’re not looking at 10, 15 years to invest and get payback.

Lack of clarity about philosophy. A few times throughout the year in journal entries, Mentor G commented on her perception that these faculty group members lacked a common understanding of their curriculum philosophy. Although she believed that the faculty had done an exceptional job of writing course descriptions, they seemed to have different assumptions or perspectives concerning the overarching philosophy of their curriculum design. In the mentor’s words:

I think that the curriculum philosophy that is one paragraph in length is not what I’m talking about. It is a shared belief, knowledge, and understanding. I think that if you really hang out together with an interactive group, you start to evolve to having the same vocabulary and, although they have been working on this process for 5 years, I don’t see that vocabulary showing up all the time in the course descriptions. It seems to be very individual work. . . .

One significant contribution that the mentor made to this faculty was the suggestion to revisit their bachelor’s degree and the courses that were offered early in the curriculum. In response to her questioning, the faculty members redesigned their baccalaureate degree. In the words of one of the faculty in her electronic reflective journal:

Another thing that our mentor master fully helped us see was the first few years of our students’ experiences. We were missing the boat a bit by not introducing Occupational Science as a concept/discipline base for the therapy curriculum that is planned to begin in their senior year. We totally missed the boat. Now it [the curriculum] feels much better. She was wonderful in helping us own that. Very skilled in helping us see a better approach. (Provident, 2004, p. 2)

It appears from both the perspective of the mentor and the participants that the yearlong mentoring relationship did yield some insight into the curriculum, which most likely would not have occurred without the mentor’s involvement. Although there was no systematic and ongoing communication through the year, the faculty members did seem to value the insight they gained related to the focus of the undergraduate degree and how this degree supported their newly developed master’s degree curriculum.

Aspects of the Faculty That Contributed to the Experience

This faculty group expressed in various sources the feeling that they were well on their way to curriculum reform, as compared to other faculty groups chosen for this project. In two of three faculty e-mail reflections received after the initial workshop in New Hampshire, these faculty members wrote that they received very little new information in the plenary sessions. They did, however, seem energized about the possibility of redesigning their bachelor’s degree with an occupational science focus. They also spoke of their curriculum as a skeleton on which one faculty member hoped that the year would add “muscle” to the form. Another hoped that the curriculum mentoring project would add “spirit” and help the curriculum to have “life.”

Throughout the journal entries, the faculty members commented on “healthy discussions” that reflected differences of opinion about how to carry out the infusion of the “occupation” concept into their newly designed courses. A number of faculty members commented on feeling surprised that so much energy was being invested in renewed curriculum discussions, because they believed that much of that work was already done. There seemed to be at least as much interest related to creating a “community of scholars” within this faculty group. In the words of one faculty member in an early journal entry:

I have also been thinking about the issue of “community of scholars” and how we can foster further development of this community within our faculty. I think this will be our biggest developmental challenge as many of us have active research agendas but there is limited day-to-day sharing of our work [and no] effort to identify how our individual work connects to some overarching theme. I think it would be so exciting to see this develop and feel that we have the potential to do so. We also have a strong commitment to the group—so there are few interpersonal barriers (within human constraints—that is) to doing this collective work.
Time of course is the enemy, as it takes time to develop this greater level of collaboration—perhaps our curriculum work will facilitate this process. (Provident, 2004, p. 1)

The university’s program director was working on a way to facilitate personal connections between the more senior faculty members, each of whom had different strengths and abilities, with those more junior, who needed support related to third-year review, promotion, and tenure. The mentor evidently sensed this desire to develop a faculty community as well, although the realization occurred 11 months into the process, after the on-site visit in May. During the final interview, she commented several times how well the mentor’s intellectual capacity suited the level of their discussions at the weekend workshop. The faculty as whole believed that she challenged them to rethink their educational plan in a mild-mannered and quietly assertive way. However, there did appear to be some concerns on both the faculty members’ and mentor’s part as to how to make this long-distance mentoring relationship work. As was feared by the mentor, once the weekend workshop was concluded and the faculty members returned to their university setting, relatively no communication occurred between the faculty group and mentor.

**Findings Related to the Project’s Structure**

The Team IV group expressed excitement in being selected for this team. During the final interview, Mentor G stated:

> I think that I left them. I didn’t feel a sense of closure, I felt a sense of . . . I’m afraid, of some vulnerability, that I left some issues sort of hanging out there and some of that is the fact that . . . some of their faculty is developmentally in different places so that they didn’t necessarily feel like the curriculum change was their first objective, some were establishing and working on tenure, establishing research agendas, and others were very interested in being active scholars, but were not interested in the others’ research agendas. So that when we got to the community of scholars . . . we had a group of people that were really working on very different places. And I felt like my being there sort of highlighted some of that.

The faculty members, for the most part, commented that they had benefited from the project because they had been exposed to another way to view their undergraduate curriculum. They seemed to work throughout the year, mostly independently, on delegated tasks. A summary of the findings of Case Two are presented in Table 4.

**Cross-Case Analysis**

In an effort to synthesize and analyze these two representative cases, I returned to the original research questions and the literature to more fully understand the outcomes of the AOTF Curriculum Mentoring Project.

**Research Question #1**

*How does an assigned formal mentor affect an occupational therapy faculty’s efforts to achieve curriculum reform?* From
these two cases, it could be concluded that a mentor can have a significant impact on curriculum reform efforts. In both cases, the faculty members stated that they achieved ways of viewing their curriculum that they otherwise would not have seen if a mentor were not involved in the process. In both cases, there was a refocusing of the faculty's perception of what they had the collective strength to offer within their curriculum. The mentors, in both of these cases, helped to shift the focus of the faculty groups to a more substantive curriculum that highlighted the vision of the faculty and integrated the context of the institution. The mentors also guided the faculty groups to see options of how to merge undergraduate and graduate curricula to make a more cohesive tie to their educational programs. In both cases, the mentors facilitated discussions among the faculty members as to what constitutes graduate-level education in occupational therapy. These discussions led to higher levels of thinking on the part of the faculty and generated ownership of the work being produced by the faculty groups.

Research Question #2

To what extent do the faculty groups experience the outcomes of curriculum change due to the process of mentoring? Both the process and outcomes related to curriculum change appear to be highly individualized, based on the makeup of the faculty, the characteristics of the mentor(s), and the time taken to establish the relationship between the mentor(s) and the faculty group. Team II, a smaller and more junior faculty group, experienced a greater amount of change and produced more tangible results. Team IV, a larger and more senior faculty group, made a complete shift in an undergraduate degree to support and lead into their new master's-degree program. Both of these faculty groups’ curriculum outcomes were achieved with the assistance of the mentor(s).

There were significant differences in how the two faculty groups established and sustained work with the mentor throughout the year. Team II developed a systematic and consistent sharing of information and documents throughout the course of the year. A variety of documents were...
shared and subsequently revised, based on the input of the mentors. Team IV, however, had virtually no contact with the mentor during the interim work phase and was slow to respond when the mentor did initiate contact. This team seemed to believe that the mentor's work was finished once the weekend workshop ended. Perhaps this perception was a result of unclear guidelines established at the onset of the project. It seems reasonable to conclude that a very important aspect of a mentoring relationship is to establish clear expectations and roles of both the participants and the mentors and to maintain a consistent, ongoing dialogue throughout the process.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to present the results of data collected during the yearlong AOTF Curriculum Mentoring Project in response to the original research questions. A two-part content analysis yielded information that addressed each of the original research questions. Overall, the faculty groups in each of the two teams seemed to benefit from mentoring in differing degrees as a result of their participation in AOTF’s Curriculum Mentoring Project. It appears as though a junior faculty group benefits more from mentors who initially direct by asking well-thought-out questions and then by allowing growth among the faculty. This model, as illustrated in Case One, demonstrated that the junior faculty group gained insight into their curricular issues by participating in a formal program. This faculty group had mentors who initially purposefully guided the process and provided opportunities later in the process that allowed the faculty to become more independent in their decision making. In Case Two, the group of faculty members, who were more senior in their makeup and had patterns of independent productivity, may have been better served by mentoring focused on team building or community-relationship building rather than on curricular issues. It also seems important that a well-focused plan be established at the onset of any formal mentoring project and presented in writing, with clear expectations as to how and when to communicate. Such guidelines would allow a long-distance mentoring relationship to sustain momentum over a year, as well as to focus on the real issues of the group.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is that the findings are not easily generalizable to all faculty groups. The reader is provided enough rich description of the context and make-up of the faculty to make an informed decision as to the similarity of their unique faculty structure.

Additional limitations related to the structure of the AOTF project are that assigned mentoring relationships may not be as beneficial as mentoring relationships that develop informally or that are based on protégé choice (Kram, 1999). Therefore, the outcomes of this study may have been substantially different if the faculty participants had chosen their mentor or mentors from a group of qualified, interested mentors who were available for the duration of the project. This method would have allowed the proteges or selected faculty groups to select the mentor based on the faculty group’s goals and the known skills of the mentor.

The 1-year time frame of the Curriculum Mentoring Project may have been insufficient to evidence significant curriculum reform. According to several authors (Mawn & Reece, 2000; Wood et al., 2000), the process of curriculum change in health-related curricula takes 2 to 3 years. Therefore, if the time frame had been extended for 30 to 36 months, the results may have been different. This may be further verified by the fact that the faculty in Case One requested the mentors to continue in their efforts, because they believed that there was still curriculum work to be done.

Implications for Education

How a faculty group uses a mentor to help shape their curriculum is a complex phenomenon, based on university context, level of faculty members, and degree of curriculum reform desired. The variability in factors such as the mentor’s skill, the faculty receptiveness, time and communication of the constituents (mentor and faculty members), as well as the support within the institution, all play a part in the outcome. Faculty members who are seeking mentors for upcoming curriculum reform efforts are encouraged to be realistic and clear in communicating their curricular goals, as well as spending time establishing clear guidelines for frequency and methods of communication. It is also suggested that the faculty members as a whole identify their goals and select a mentor who has the time, experience, and resources needed to provide challenge and support for the duration of the curricular reform process.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study yielded a sufficient amount of data to analyze and report the outcomes with relative confidence. This initial inquiry reveals the potential for future research in the area of using mentors to assist faculty groups in curriculum change efforts. First, it would be important to conduct a similar study comparing the outcomes of the faculty groups...
selected to participate in a formal curriculum project to the outcomes of faculty groups who were not selected. This comparison would yield interesting information concerning the effects of the mentor in groups with a similar investment in the curriculum reform process. Such a study would also determine the amount and quality of curriculum change in faculty groups who do not work with a mentor to inform their work.

Another potential for research would be to investigate the outcomes of faculty groups with assigned mentors versus faculty groups who have self-selected mentors. The outcomes of this proposed study would be important in making future decisions about the system of mentor assignment versus mentor selection.

Yet another proposed research suggestion would be to duplicate this study with the following structural revisions to the project: (a) all members of faculty groups attending the initial workshop, (b) allowing a longer time (30–36 months) for the curriculum reform project, and (c) providing more opportunity for the mentor to experience the context of the participants’ university setting by making several on-site visits. With these changes to a curriculum mentoring project in place, it would be interesting to analyze the outcomes to see whether substantive differences occurred from this initial investigation.

A final potential research study would be to survey all of the undergraduate occupational therapy programs in the United States to see what faculty efforts have been in regard to curriculum reform. It would be useful to know what is being done and the extent to which the academic community is changing occupational therapy curricula across the nation to enhance education for the entry-level occupational therapist.

Conclusions
The findings from this study contribute to a fundamental professional understanding of using mentors in the occupational therapy profession for the purpose of curriculum change. This understanding is important because many other occupational therapy academic programs will be making curriculum changes until 2007 to meet the demands of Resolution J, and then subsequent quality-enhancing changes to comply with the new educational Standards. The outcomes of these two teams involved in AOTF’s Curriculum Mentoring Project will serve as baseline information, which will be useful in helping faculty groups decide whether to engage with a mentor to assist their curriculum change efforts.

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