MRC
Mentoring Resource Center
FACT SHEET

In This Issue . . .

...we examine the role of "evidence-based practice" in youth mentoring programs. In recent years, research-based findings have strongly influenced how mentoring programs structure and deliver service. Our feature article in this issue highlights new perspectives on this trend as they were presented at the 2009 Summer Insititute on Youth Mentoring event.

Thanks for the memories... This is the last issue of the *MRC Fact Sheet*, as the Mentoring Resource Center project is coming to a close this month. See page 13 for a farewell message from our staff.

Research and Practice:
The Role of Evidence-Based Program Practices in the Youth Mentoring Field

A Recent Event Explores How Research Influences Practice in the Mentoring Field

Professionals in the education, youth work, and mentoring fields have long sought "best practices" to guide their work and help structure the services they provide young people. Funders, policymakers, and researchers also value these best practices, often a blend of formal evaluation findings and the prevailing professional wisdom in a given field, as a way of framing what quality programming looks like in action.

Recent years have seen a shift in the perceived value and application of evidence-based best practices. Increasingly, rigorously researched program "models" are seen as the answer to the vexing question of "what works" in terms of educating students and promoting positive youth development. This shift towards "gold-standard" research findings is best illustrated in initiatives such as the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, the Blueprints for Violence Prevention, the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, and the Society for Prevention Research's "Standards of Evidence." Each of these efforts aims to define, primarily through rigorous science, what constitutes "effective" programming and even how success is ultimately defined for those working in a particular field. For the mentoring field, it can seem as if the days of homegrown program models and participant satisfaction surveys are fad-

ing, replaced by a landscape where rigorous research and outcome-driven evaluation are often defining what programs look like and how they are funded.

What does this shift in the landscape mean for today's mentoring professionals? At times, it leads to confusion and uncertainty. Today's mentoring program coordinator is often faced with a complicated relationship with this recent move toward evidence-based practice (EBP) that raises such questions as:

- *If I read about a research finding in a new report, what does it mean for my program? Should we follow their recommendations? Are they applicable to us?*

- *Will our funders expect that we implement certain "best practices" based on new research findings? What if those best practices won't work in our program setting?*

- *What youth outcomes should we measure? Grades? Risky behavior? Should I let our funders decide?*

- *How do I find research about how to improve our unique program? And how do we tell if that research is relevant or not? So many funding agencies are telling us what practices to follow, but isn't it my job as the program coordinator to figure out what works best?*

The surge of evidence-based practice in the mentoring field was on participants' minds as the third annual **Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring** (SIYM) convened July 20–24 at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. As in past years, the goal of this SIYM was to spur dialogue between mentoring researchers and practitioners, so that both groups can learn from each other and help move the mentoring field forward in the years to come. With a recent spate of high-profile mentoring studies being released in the past year (see Additional Reading and Research starting on page 8), SIYM founder and director Tom Keller of Portland State University felt the time was right for an extended dialogue on the role of research in the mentoring field and how mentoring practitioners (not to mention policymakers and funders) can use existing research to improve programs and outcomes for youth participants.

"Mentoring professionals are faced with a daunting task," says Keller. "They often come to research with the mindset of 'What does the research say? What should we be doing?' They expect definitive answers and clear guidance. However, research is rarely clear-cut and straightforward, and it is important to get beyond the headlines or the quick takeaways. Professionals need to be empowered as skilled and nuanced consumers of research. That's the type of professional development we are trying to facilitate with the Summer Institute."

(A full listing of this year's SIYM Research Fellows, and a synopsis of their presentations, begins on page 5.)

What is Evidence-Based Practice?

The concept of EBP actually has its roots in the medical field, where the work of Archie Cochrane (1972) and others examined the key role that the substantial body of medical research and literature could play in how doctors make decisions in patient care. If a patient comes to a doctor presenting X, Y, and Z symptoms, how does that doctor methodically use the existing research to help diagnose the problem and make treatment decisions? What is interesting about EBP in this original sense is that it is not about providing concrete answers, but rather providing a framework by which a professional (in this case, a doctor) can make an educated *decision*. Understood this way, EBP is less about rigid "this works, this doesn't" dualism and more about teaching professionals to supplement their own experience and judgment with that of others.

It is worth noting here that evidence-based medicine is viewed as having two distinct camps: evidence-based *guidelines*, which are the domain of institutions and organizations as they turn research into set standards of practice, and evidence-based *decisionmaking*, which refers to the doctor's process described above. It's easy to see that these two camps might often have very different philosophies and goals in how the same piece of research knowledge is applied. One is devoted to producing regulations and guidelines, the other to facilitating intellectual freedom and at least some autonomy in making decisions. As discussed later, this tension between how research is used for policy versus how it is used for individualized practice was a major theme at this year's SIYM.

From its start in the medical field, EBP quickly spread to other disciplines, such as public health and education. The sidebar on page 3 provides several definitions of EBP taken from various fields.

Evidence-Based Practice is…

From the medical profession: "Evidence based medicine is the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The practice of evidence based medicine means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research. By individual clinical expertise we mean the proficiency and judgment that individual clinicians acquire through clinical experience and clinical practice." (Sackett et al., 1996)

From the world of pshychology: "integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture and preferences" (American Psychological Association, 2003)

From the public health field: "the development, implementation, and evaluation of effective programs and policies in public health through application of principles of scientific reasoning, including systematic uses of data and information systems, and appropriate use of behavioral science theory and program planning models" (Brownson et al., 2003)

Definitions courtesy of David DuBois' 2009 SIYM presentation "Evidence-Based Practice: A Primer for Mentoring Professionals"

SIYM Research Fellow David DuBois of the University of Illinois-Chicago offered this definition of EBP as he sees it being applied to the youth mentoring field:

> *"The conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of both external research and internal program monitoring and evaluation data, as well as other sources of knowledge, to inform decisions about the design and ongoing improvement of mentoring programs and services for youth."*

So what this means for mentoring professionals is that they should always be using research to help drive programmatic decisions. While this may sound straightforward, the discussions that unfolded over the course of the weeklong SIYM highlighted some of the many tensions in the youth mentoring community about the current value and use of EBP. Among the many issues discussed:

- *The value of hard research vs. the value of practitioner wisdom*. While all in attendance were appreciative of the efforts of the research community, there were concerns that recent research findings were transplanting the wisdom found in practitioner experience and client feedback and stifling innovation in program design. Dr. Keller noted in his opening remarks that mentoring remains a field where what "works" tends to bubble up organically

from new strategies implemented at local sites, rather than from top-down, research-derived "standards" at the policy level. In a climate where only "gold-standard," experimentally-designed evaluations are assigned real value, there is a risk that practitioners will be restricted in the choices they can make and limited in what they can learn from each other's experiences.

- *The usefulness of internal data vs. external research*. As noted earlier, EBP was originally conceived as a method of inquiry that blends external research-derived information with an individual's own experiences and understanding. While everyone at the SIYM agreed that the most meaningful research is that conducted on one's own program, the reality is that the mentoring field is moving toward universal standards of practice, rather than allowing programs to create their own interpretations of what best practices look like based on their own internal research and observation.

This tension was most evident during the session by Research Fellow and former University of North Carolina professor Janis Kupersmidt discussing the current revision of the *Elements of Effective Practice* by MENTOR/National Men-

toring Partnership. This revision, which is nearing completion, is attempting to ground every program "element" in published research. While participants applauded the attempt at creating a set of standards that were directly linked to research findings, many wondered if this type of framework might hamper innovation or customization at the program level, especially if these standards were tied to funding opportunities. Finding a balance between the need for widely applied standards of practice as well as for more flexibility and local-data-driven decisionmaking at the individual program level was a recurring theme throughout the week.

- **The importance of qualitative vs. quantitative research**. The research community in mentoring has a somewhat divided focus these days: researchers are either focusing their attention on "softer" research that explores mentoring participants' experiences, perceptions, and actions, or research that is built on randomly assigned control trials and statistically significant pre/post changes in mentee behavior. As noted earlier, the current emphasis is on experimentally-designed evaluation, but many SIYM participants noted that the qualitative research may actually teach us more about how mentoring works for individuals and how programs can best facilitate their mentoring relationships. Which brings us to…

- **The tension between research on mentoring relationships and research on the short and long-term outcomes of those relationships**. Michael Nakkula of the University of Pennsylvania gave two presentations focused on his qualitative research into how mentoring relationships function and how we, as practitioners, define whether they have been successful or not. He summarized the tension between research on relationships and research on outcomes with these framing questions: *Must mentoring relationships be associated with targeted outcomes beyond the match in order for mentoring to be deemed successful? If so, what outcomes are appropriate? And who gets to decide?*

- **The confusion as to whether research should be focused on improving program practice or on widely applied policy**. Most "gold standard" mentoring research is funded from the policy perspective: *Does this federal program work? Is this nonprofit effective? Is mentoring an effective intervention for youth population X?* Those types of evaluations are expensive, and funders expect firm answers in return. But practitioners may come to research from a different perspective: *What can it teach me about improving what I'm already doing?*

To practitioners, the justification for their program is already covered—youth in their community have needs and they are trying to meet them through volunteer mentors. That's not going to change, and as a result, they may be less interested in black-and-white issues of "does this work?" and are more focused on "how can this intervention, which we already know works, work better for our youth?" This is not to say that all research in service of policy is uninterested in the details of how programs work best, but in a large sense, it is focused on definitive statements, where practitioners are more in need of nuance and granularity.

- **The disagreement about what constitutes "evidence of effectiveness" in mentoring**. For all the efforts over the years to clarify what successful mentoring looks like, there is still plenty of disagreement about what a successful match, let alone a successful program model, looks like. What do we mean when we say something is "effective?" And what constitutes an effective program "model?"

One example that came up during the week was that many of the federal mentoring initiatives to this point have required grantees to adhere to a program "model" that is very similar to that found in a typical Big Brothers Big Sisters program or the models used by other prominent mentoring organizations. But the quality and outcomes of these funded programs, all supposedly implementing research-proven models, have varied greatly depending on staff skills, available resources, program leadership, and contextual factors such as community, economics, and culture. Does that inconsistency say anything about those program models? Do we rethink the value of

2009 SIYM Research Fellows and Guest Speakers

The Research Fellows and Guest Speakers for the 2009 PSU Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring (SIYM) highlighted the incredible diversity of high-level research being conducted in the mentoring field. Each offered a unique perspective on how evidence-based practice is being applied to programming and policy. Sessions touched on such diverse topics as mentor recruitment, program marketing, mentoring relationship characteristics, match creation and termination, and participant training, while also allowing for plenty of discussion of "big picture" topics, such as broadly applied program models and the value of universal best practices.

Throughout this issue we highlight each Fellow and Guest Speaker from this year's SIYM, as well as the opening presentation by SIYM Founder Tom Keller, and provide a synopsis of each presentation. More information about individual Fellows and their presentations can be found on the SIYM Web site at http://www.youthmentoring.ssw.pdx.edu/.

Tom Keller, the Duncan & Cindy Campbell Professor in Social Work at Portland State University, opened the event with an overview of its primary goal: to encourage an extended, in-depth dialogue between researchers and professionals that advances the field of mentoring. Dr. Keller noted that several national organizations are pursuing initiatives that could have broad influence: MENTOR is producing a 3rd Edition of the *Elements of Effective Practice*, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is enhancing national program models based on research, and several state partnerships are discussing practice standards for member programs. Because the SIYM addresses a different theme each year, Keller felt the time was right to take a close look at the research evidence pertaining to each stage of formal mentoring programs—from recruitment to match closure—and how it is being used to guide practice.

"I have three broad observations based on the great discussions during the Summer Institute: 1) Because youth mentoring programs are very diverse in their goals, populations, and models, we need to differentiate the field when we talk about appropriate practices and standards. Certain types of programs may have very good reasons for being more or less intensive, for example, and general guidelines for the field should allow well-informed and thoughtful program leaders to do things somewhat differently based on their own circumstances. 2) Several areas of practice, such as training staff and recruiting volunteers and closing matches, have received very little research attention, and many important questions need to be addressed. 3) Programs are at the forefront of innovation in mentoring, and we can all learn from them if they collect and share information about their experiences in a systematic fashion."

a model if others have a hard time replicating those results? Or is the original evaluation that showed the model was "effective" all that really matters?

SIYM Research Fellow Andrea Taylor, creator of the Across Ages program, spoke at length about the inherent difficulties in turning a program from a "successful, research-proven model" to a widely implemented program operating all over the country. Several research studies show that the Across Ages "model" is effective, that it is a successful strategy that achieves its stated goals. But Across Ages, historically, has not worked in every setting, for a variety of reasons. Some replications of the program have been very successful, others less so, illustrating that even the most rigorous best practices and models can lose all meaning within the myriad contexts of local practice and implementation.

Given these complicated issues, how can the mentoring field arrive at a point where EBP has meaning for practitioners in improving their local programs while also satisfying the need for big picture answers to the questions of funders and policymakers? Back to that classic EBP question: How do we reconcile the use of evidence for *organizational guidelines* and the use of evidence for *practitioner decisionmaking*? And how do program coordinators and other mentoring professionals make sense of all this? To that end, the 2009 SIYM provided plenty of advice for mentoring practitioners on how to better understand research and apply evidence-based practice in their own work.

Critical Perspectives on Evidence-Based Practice

In an effort to provide SIYM participants with concepts and skills to help navigate the world of mentoring research and best practice, DuBois focused one of his presentations on what he termed "critical perspectives" on the evidence-based practice theory. These perspectives highlight some of the problems that arise in the use of EBP in various fields:

- **The "Circularity/Ambiguity" Problem**. By definition, evidence-based practice is the use of whatever evidence "works best," which makes it both obvious and self-referencing, but also somewhat vague. As DuBois put it, "Who would ever argue in favor of *not* using the best information or ideas? We all inherently seek that. But the problem is, who decides what 'best' is? That's a pretty mushy term that could mean almost anything."

- **The Simplicity Problem**. Evidence-based practice often attempts to provide simple answers to questions that require subjective interpretations and contextual framing. The reality might be that there are no obvious "right" answers to the questions mentoring researchers and policymakers ask, yet the field is trying to determine what constitutes "evidence" with increasingly rigorous methods. Proponents of EBP can forget that a program's local context is likely to moderate or condition many research findings. This helps explain why research-proven program models can be so hard to replicate

in other settings: the evidence-based shoe doesn't always fit.

- **The Narrowness Problem**. This comes in two flavors: 1) The narrow preference for only *one kind* of evidence—randomized control trial research. Most attempts at rigid EBP models place randomized control trial research far above other evidence. 2) The emphasis on research in general (of any type) over other forms of evidence. Client feedback, organizational wisdom, and practitioner experience can all get drowned out in the exclusive use of research to make decisions.

- **The Evidence Problem**. Ironically, there is little research to date on the efficacy of the evidence-based practice approach compared to other approaches. In other words, does adoption of the EBP approach itself really achieve its aims? If we are going to define "what works" shouldn't we also be studying the values and processes by which we make that determination?

Understanding and Interpreting Research

Given these criticisms of evidence-based practice, what should practitioners do when confronted with research that may or may not have meaning for their own program? There are several frameworks for judging and interpreting the quality and usefulness of research and sources of "evidence." One such framework is the "TAPUPAS" model proposed by Ray Pawson and his colleagues (2003) at the Social Care Institute for Excellence in Great Britain. This framework encourages practitioners to analyze the quality of research by examining its:

Transparency. Is it open to scrutiny? Is it easy to tell how the evidence was generated?

Accuracy. Is it well grounded? Are the recommendations and conclusions based on data or are they just asserted with little basis in the research itself?

Purposivity. Is it fit for the purpose? Was the methodology a good fit for the types of questions being researched?

2009 SIYM RESEARCH FELLOWS

One of the field's leading researchers, **David DuBois** of the University of Illinois–Chicago, provided three presentations at this year's SIYM. Two of these, *Evidence-Based Practice: A Primer for Mentoring Professionals* and *Putting Evidence to Work: Using Monitoring and Evaluation Data to Improve Youth Mentoring Programs*, focused on the role of evidence-based practice and how practitioners can use research and other data sources for continuous program improvement. DuBois' third presentation examined the complex interplay between match structure (and activities) and participant outcomes. According to the data DuBois presented, there does seem to be some evidence that structured matches, where mentors and mentees are provided focused opportunities for specific types of interactions, can be very effective, provided the structure does not interfere with the development of relationship closeness and communication. DuBois illustrated these ideas through examples from the GirlPower! program in Chicago.

Janis Kupersmidt, former University of North Carolina professor and current president of innovation Research and Training (iRT), provided two enlightening presentations at this year's SIYM. Her presentation on the evidence base surrounding mentor training illustrated just how thoroughly mentoring research has contributed to the structure and focus of how today's mentors are trained in programs all over the country. The current emphasis in most programs on mentor skills such as active listening, building trust, and understanding a mentor's limitations and boundaries are all directly linked to several prominent pieces of research that changed the way practitioners thought about the role of pre-match training. This illustrates how evidence-based practice evolves over time for an entire field, not just one program.

Kupersmidt also presented two examples of evidence-based tools for practitioners. The training presentation ended with a demonstration of an online training curriculum (currently in development) based entirely on principles taken directly from research. The other presentation focused on the new *Elements of Effective Practice* from MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership (also currently being developed). MENTOR is attempting to ground every recommended program practice, every "element," in some finding from published mentoring research, an effort that shows just how thoroughly "evidence" can be applied to practice.

Utility. Is it fit for use? Can information presented be used by others in the field, or is it incomplete or missing important information that would help in practical use?

Propriety. Is it legal and ethical? Was the research conducted with the consent of stakeholders and within ethical guidelines?

Accessibility. Is it intelligible? Is the information presented in a way that allows those who need it to readily understand and use it ? Many research reports that would have significant value to the field often bury the key findings and recommendations in page after page of methodological description and technical jargon.

Specificity. Are there specific standards in a field that come into play? For example, if a researched program model demonstrated considerable success, but did not screen adult mentors in any way, practitioners would likely think skeptically about "evidence" from that program and would deviate from that aspect of the model if they were to implement it.

In addition to using this type of framework to interpret and understand research, practitioners should also expand their ideas about what qualifies as "evidence." Client feedback, community opinions and culture, policy, organizational values, and the mentoring professional's own experience and wisdom can all be considered forms of evidence and sources of meaning.

The mentoring field should not rely solely on random control trial evaluations for answers to practitioners' questions.

(See Figure 1 for DuBois' representation of what this "idealized" configuration of evidence-based practice might look like.)

To further enhance practitioners' ability to find an approach to evidence-based practice that works for them, DuBois closed one of his presentations with his "Top 10 List for the EBP-Minded Mentoring Professional" (see page 9). These principles can help practitioners find and use research and other information effectively for program improvement.

After a week of vigorous debate and insightful comments, attendees of the 2009 SIYM left knowing that, if we are to arrive at a properly working model of evidence-based practice in the mentoring field, more voices and additional forms of evidence are needed to supplement the rigorous research taking place. Yes, the field needs more random control research, but it also needs to hear from mentees, parents, teachers, volunteers, community stakeholders, and others whose lives are touched by mentoring. They can supply plenty of evidence as to what works and what does not. That evidence is important, even if it can't be quantified with an effect size or discussed in terms of standard deviations and "p" values. And the field still needs practitioners who develop innovative programs and who occasionally break away from the "best practices" in an effort to try something that might work even better.

Although funders, policymakers, and researchers may continue to look for the universal "truths" of the mentoring field, practitioners should realize that the heart of evidence-based practice is simply having a desire to constantly find quality information, from any source, and apply it to the continuous improvement of services. That starts not with the research conducted by others on other programs, but with research, both quantitative

Figure 1. Optimal Evidence-Based Practice with Multiple Sources

and qualitative, into one's own program, supplemented with wisdom and "evidence" from other practitioners and stakeholders. (See page 10 for tips from this year's SIYM on conducting your own research.) Remember, *you*, the mentoring professional, get to decide what's best in meeting the needs of your mentee and your community, provided you gather the evidence to support your decisions.

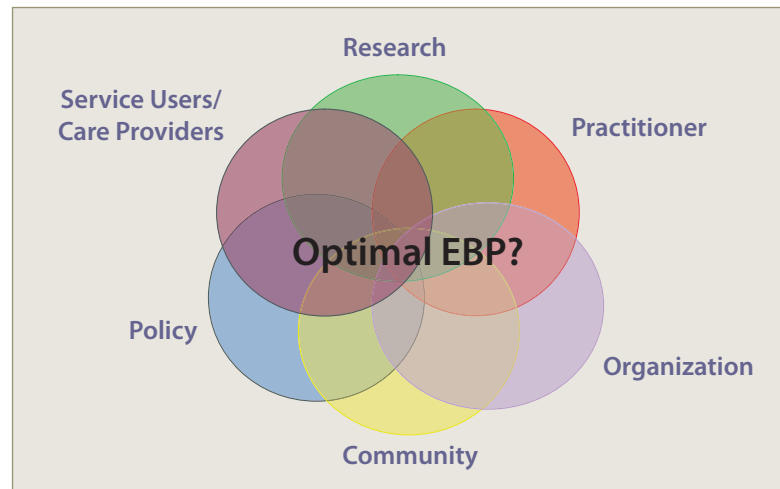*You can learn more about the 2009 SIYM, as well as review past Institutes, online at: http://www.youthmentoring.ssw.pdx.edu/.*

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Additional Reading & Research

The following reports and research- or EBP-focused articles can help you better understand recent school-

Top 10 List for the EBP-Minded Mentoring Professional
presented by David DuBois at the 2009 SIYM

1) Seek out and utilize all forms of research that may inform the practice of youth mentoring

2) Cultivate collaborations with researchers

3) Develop and utilize internal and local sources of evidence

4) Be a critical consumer of all forms and sources of evidence

5) Pay equal attention to evidence that supports or challenges existing practices

6) Pay special attention to findings/learnings that replicate across different studies and sources of evidence as well as to those that emerge out of reliable syntheses by others of available evidence

7) Infuse use of evidence in decision-making into all areas and levels of agency operation

8) Institute processes to cultivate use of evidence by program staff

9) Assign staff to assume leadership role(s) in EBP

10) Evaluate all decisions and proposed solutions, regardless of their evidentiary basis

based mentoring research and the role that EBP is currently playing in the youth mentoring field.

Impact Evaluation of the U. S. Department of Education's Student Mentoring Program (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) — http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094047/

High School Students as Mentors: Findings From the Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study (Public/Private Ventures, 2008) — http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/252_publication.pdf

Making a Difference in Schools: The Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study (Public/Private Ventures, 2007) — http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/220_publication.pdf

Standards of Evidence (Society for Prevention Research, 2004) — http://www.preventionresearch.org/StandardsofEvidencebook.pdf

Strengthening Mentoring Opportunities for At-Risk Youth (Timothy Cavell, David DuBois, Michael Karcher, Thomas Keller, and Jean Rhodes, 2009) — http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/mentoring_policy_brief.pdf

The Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (SMILE): A Randomized Study of the Effectiveness of School-Based Mentoring (Michael Karcher, 2008) — http://www.michaelkarcher.com/survey/pdf/Karcher_2008_SMILEOnlineFirst.pdf

Understanding and Facilitating the Youth Mentoring Movement (Society for Research in Child Development, 2006) — http://www.srcd.org/documents/publications/spr/spr20-3.pdf

What is Evidence-Based Practice? Part 1 in a Series on Fostering the Adoption of Evidence-Based Practices in Out-Of-School Time Programs (Child Trends, 2007) — http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2007_06_04_RB_EBP1.pdf

Websites

Blueprints for Violence Prevention — http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/

Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy — http://coalition4evidence.org/wordpress/

Society for Prevention Research — http://www.preventionscience.org/

What Works Clearinghouse — http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

Tips for Conducting Your Own Research

One of the prominent themes at the 2009 SIYM was the need for local programs and practitioners to rely less on research from outside sources and more on internal research into their own processes and outcomes. The following tips on how programs can best conduct their own research and contribute to the body of knowledge on youth mentoring came up over the course of the week:

- Develop or refine your program logic model. A logic model illustrates exactly how your program's services, and the mentoring relationships you create, foster the expected outcomes for your mentees and the larger community you serve. You cannot accurately measure your success unless you are clear about how that success is manufactured. So connect all the dots between the needs of youth and how the relationships your mentors provide meet those needs.

- Use validated instruments. You can only get reliable data from a reliable instrument. So instead of developing your own surveys or evaluation instruments, see if you can use an existing tool to give you the reliable information you need. Funders love to see positive youth impacts demonstrated using an already-validated measure.

- Try using internal "control groups." You may not be able to participate in large scale random control trial evaluations, but that doesn't mean your program can't borrow aspects of that approach for your own internal research. Randomly assign mentors and mentees if you are wondering about the efficacy of some planned change in your program model. For example, if you want to revamp your mentor training curriculum, randomly assign mentors to get either the old training or the new, and measure their subsequent changes in their mentoring skills and in the quality of their mentoring relationships. If you see differences between the two groups of trainees, you can draw conclusions about whether your new curriculum is more effective than the old. You can also take advantage of naturally-occurring comparison groups to evaluate a programmatic change. For example, compare the group of mentors trained using your old curriculum for the last six months with a group trained using the new curriculum in the first six months of its implementation.

- Get serious about data collection. Invest in software that can keep data organized and easy to work with. MentorPro (http://www.mentoring.org/about_mentor/news_press/mentor_minutes/mentorpro/) and Civicore (http://www.civicore.com/mentormatch) are great options for programs that want to manage their data more effectively.

- Collaborate with researchers whenever possible. Even if you don't have the budget to bring in a big-time evaluator, partner with local colleges and universities to get the evaluation expertise you need. Graduate students are always looking for data-driven projects.

- Share your data. If you use someone's validated instrument, share your results with the researcher who developed it (just remember to remove all identifying information about your participants). If you have a state mentoring partnership, ask if they could use your data. The more data that gets shared, the more that is available to researchers for meta-analyses and other cross-program investigations. More high quality data means better information being used in evidence-based practice.

If you are brand new to the world of program evaluation, you can find a good introduction to this work in the MRC's *Frequently Asked Questions About Research and Evaluation* at http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/ws2_supplement2.pdf.

Mike Nakkula of the University of Pennsylvania focused his presentations on the very heart of mentoring: the mentoring relationship. His first presentation, *Match Structure and Mentoring Relationship Quality*, highlighted his research on the relationship between match focus, match quality, and instrumental youth outcomes. His research is conducted, in part, using two instruments he has developed with John Harris of Applied Research Consulting: the Youth Mentoring Survey, which assesses match structure and interaction from the mentee's perspective, and the Match Characteristic Questionnaire, which asks mentors to reflect on the qualities of their relationship.

Data from these two instruments show a strong relationship between match-reported focus and match quality (if matches agree on the focus, they tend to be happier and more effective), as well as highlighting the need for fun and sharing in all types of mentoring matches. *Note: These two instruments are available to mentoring practitioners by emailing John Harris at inquiries@ mentoringevaluation.com. You can learn more about these tools and how they can be used at: http://www.mentoringevaluation.com/ Tools.htm.*

Nakkula's second presentation, *Closeness and Complexity in Adult-Youth Mentoring Relationships*, explored the relationship between match bonding and the level of complexity in their interactions. Nakkula's analysis demonstrates that relationship closeness and complexity are linked and evolve together over time, with factors such as gender, youth risk status, match focus, and the level of program support also influencing the level of closeness and complexity of interaction. His research illustrates the many factors that go into creating a successful match over time, and the importance of providing program structures that allow for increasingly meaningful interactions as the match progresses.

For her two presentations at the SIYM, **Andrea Taylor** of Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning drew on her experience as the driving force behind Across Ages, one of the most studied and replicated models in the mentoring field. Her presentation, *Dissemination and Replication: The Across Ages Example*, focused on the issues that can crop up when trying to implement even a proven and successful program model. Common barriers to successful implementation include low staff-to-match ratios, limited partnerships, and unintended deviation from aspects of the researched program model. This led to considerable discussion about how research on "what works" needs to focus as much on program infrastructure and agency capacity as it does on mentoring services and outcomes.

Taylor's presentation on mentor recruitment examined what we can learn from the research in other disciplines and fields, such as marketing, branding, advertising, and even social networking, and how to apply that research to the recruitment of mentors. It was an interesting look at how practitioners need to cast an increasingly wide net in their attempts to learn from research.

2009 SIYM GUEST SPEAKERS

Harold Briggs, Professor in the School of Social Work at Portland State University, gave a spirited presentation on his own upbringing and how that experience shaped his future efforts to implement evidence-based community health programs in communities of need. Briggs stressed the critical role that community feedback, local culture, and client voices need to play in any evidence-based decisionmaking. Without listening to these other sources of "evidence of effectiveness" practitioners have little hope

The 2009 SIYM presenters and participants

of providing services that meet their intended goals. Briggs also talked about how his non-traditional route to academia had shown him the value of "thinking differently," asking critical questions, and constantly seeking new information and fresh ideas, traits he feels can guide mentoring practitioners in their attempts at evidence-based practice.

Carla Herrera of Public/Private Ventures and **Michael Karcher** of the University of Texas–San Antonio offered a joint presentation on the two major school-based mentoring studies they have led. Herrera's presentation focused considerable attention on how programs should think about making changes in response to evaluation findings. What can programs do when confronted with their new "evidence"? Herrera's experience with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America illustrated the dramatic changes to both the traditional school-based mentoring model (increased summer contact, emphasis on multi-year matches) and the High School Bigs peer mentoring model (increased training and support for peer mentors) that resulted from P/PV's findings. To their credit, Big Brothers Big Sisters' response to their own research findings—an enhanced school-based mentoring model that is now also being rigorously evaluated—is a perfect example of local, data-driven evidence-based decisionmaking.

Karcher stressed that his findings varied in relation to the specific characteristics of youth served. His Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (SMILE) examined the following question: For young people already receiving school-based services, who benefits most from the addition of a mentor? The study found that elementary boys received the greatest benefits, followed by older girls, while younger girls and older boys showed fewer benefits. Karcher also delivered a lively presentation about what his work has taught him about diverse approaches to match activities, positing an approach that blends developmental and instrumental activities. Together, these presentations underscored the week's themes both of diversity and of the importance of collecting site-specific evidence to truly understand the impact of services on youth and improve local services.

Please contact SIYM Director Tom Keller (kellert@pdx.edu) if you have questions about the presentations at this year's event or plans for future Summer Institutes.

Thank you for the past five years!

As you may know, this is the last issue of the MRC *Fact Sheet*. As the project winds to a close, the staff of the Mentoring Resource Center would like to thank the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools at the U.S. Department of Education for the opportunity to have served as the Training and Technical Assistance provider for the Student Mentoring program. We would also like to thank the staff at all of the funded sites we have worked with over the past five years. You are all doing incredible work serving the nation's young people and we are humbled and inspired by your efforts to bring the power of mentoring to thousands of students across the country. We hope that the training, publications, information services, and other resources we provided helped make your jobs a little easier and helped improve the quality of your mentoring efforts.

Please remember that the Mentoring Forums Web site (http://mentoringforums.nwrel.org) will continue and remain an excellent place for all of you in the mentoring field to come and "talk shop," as well as interact with many members of our MRC staff.

EMT Associates, Inc., the lead organization for the Mentoring Resource Center, has many tools and resources available, including:

- My Prevention Community (MPC), a free social utility network that connects prevention-focused professionals, consultants and adult students locally and throughout the country. Many mentoring and prevention-related resources are also housed on this site, and links to MRC materials will be available here. You can join this community free by visiting http://www.mypreventioncommunity.org/ and clicking on the registration link on the right.

- The EMT Online University, which offers self paced courses on subjects related to Mentoring and also to Drug Abuse Prevention (http://www.eoudemo.org/).

- CARS Mentoring, a sister project of EMT, which has numerous mentoring resources on its Web site (http://www.cars-mentoring.org/publications/index.php).

The National Mentoring Center at Education Northwest (formerly NWREL), EMT's partner on the MRC project, also has a comprehensive set of resources, free publications, and links to other mentoring resources on its Web site and also hosts an electronic mailing list (MentorExchange) that you can join (http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring).

Best of luck to all of your programs and we hope to have an opportunity to work with you down the road!

— *Judy, Joel, Nicky, Amy, Mike, Patti, Kari, Kay, Mark and all the other trainers and staff on the MRC Team*

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