

BUILDING A BETTER CRAFT



The 2010 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring Demonstrates the Power of an Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Mentoring

2010 SIYM Research Fellows

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Susan Murphy, Ph.D. — Professor and Director of Strategic Leadership Studies at James Madison University in Virginia

Kevin O'Neill, Ph.D. — Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University in Canada

Jean Rhodes, Ph.D. — Professor of Psychology at University of Massachusetts, Boston

Carmit-Noa Shpigelman, Ph.D. — Department of Education at Western Galilee College in Israel

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A listing of select publications and articles from each of the 2010 SIYM Fellows can be found at the end of this article.

Michael Garringer, *National Mentoring Center*

For a week in July, 2010, approximately forty leaders in the field of mentoring gathered from around the world at Portland State University's School of Social Work for the 2010 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring (SIYM). Over the past four years, SIYM has created unique opportunities for researchers and practitioners to share ideas and insights in an effort to advance the mentoring field. This year's event featured six distinguished Research Fellows (see sidebar). Each scholar, as well as several other guest speakers and youth mentoring advocates, offered presentations on recent research and program innovations. As in past years, the exchange between mentoring researchers and select practitioners from the U.S. and international community inspired innovative new ideas and robust discussion about opportunities and challenges facing the youth mentoring movement.

The overarching theme of the 2010 SIYM was the use of technology and its role in youth mentoring relationships and programs. This theme was timely for several reasons. Rapid changes in communication technology over the last 10–20 years have radically altered how individuals in modern societies interact and form bonds with each other. This circumstance is altering the context in which mentoring takes place and the mechanisms that drive mentoring relationships.

But the broad theme of technology also allowed for something else at the 2010 SIYM: the expansion of the research presented into other disciplines and fields of study. This has long been a goal of SIYM Director **Thomas Keller**, who also serves as the Duncan and Cindy Campbell Professor for Children, Youth, and Families with an Emphasis on Mentoring in the School of Social Work at Portland State University. Keller's vision for cross-discipline dialogue around issues of mentoring led to the recent formation of the Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring Research (CIMR) at

PSU. A core goal of CIMR is to promote research that explores the connections between workplace, higher education, and youth mentoring, as well as connections across other specialized mentoring models, such as those for individuals with disabilities or programs for those transitioning out of correctional institutions. By exploring these other mentoring contexts and systems, Keller believes that we can reach a fuller understanding of how and why mentoring works for individuals at various points in their lives.



This interdisciplinary approach was on full display at the 2010 SIYM. In addition to traditional youth mentoring topics, the research and theory presented also touched on:

- e-mentoring
- team and group mentoring
- workplace and higher education mentoring
- psychology
- youth and leadership development
- evaluation and assessment theory
- ethics
- public policy

While there have been several major research studies specifically on youth mentoring in recent years, the overall body of research on its effectiveness is still evolving slowly, despite great public attention

on mentoring's potential. This has left many in the field wondering how we can gain new perspectives and insights that will improve mentoring services and relationships. The week of vigorous intellectual exchange at the 2010 SIYM illustrated that youth mentoring prac-

tioners can, indeed, learn a great deal by engaging other disciplines and expanding their research horizons.

The Power of Fresh Ideas

The value in this interdisciplinary approach was illustrated during the week by **KEVIN O'NEILL**, a professor of education from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia. O'Neill opened his presentation "Adventures in E-Mentoring" with

a fascinating example of how exposure to new ideas can spur meaningful innovation: the development of the modern airplane.

O'Neill took participants through the early adventures of the Wright brothers as they attempted to conquer flight. He explained that the Wrights were conservative inventors, making only small changes to their original designs and focusing on limited technical improvements in their prototypes. Across the Atlantic in France, aspiring aviators such as Louis Blériot were experimenting with much more radical airplane designs. Blériot was a wild innovator, and each of his prototypes was substantially different than the previous ones. He experimented with different wing configurations, steering mechanisms, and materials, often with spectacularly failed results. While the Wrights favored small tweaks and tightly controlled experiments (for example, they were the first to use wind tunnels to examine the aerodynamics of wings), Blériot was more than content to try a variety of concepts, thinking that one of his designs would eventually pan out.

The modern airplane, as we know it, was born when these two groups of innovators met in the early 1900s. The Wrights gained several key insights into how to improve their aircraft by observing Blériot's radical designs. They moved the propeller to the front of the plane (their previous models had the motor in the back, creating drag

and adding control issues to the craft). They also borrowed Blériot's innovations in control surfaces on the tail, allowing for better control at lower speeds. These innovations ultimately provided the world with the basic configuration of the modern airplane, one that is still in use today. Perhaps the Wrights would have stumbled on these innovations on their own, but their conservative style made such fresh innovation difficult. their research horizons.

Design Research as a Way of Exploring New Ideas

Participants at the 2010 SIYM immediately saw the power in this aviation metaphor. Youth mentoring practitioners are often inclined to take

the Wright's conservative approach: there is an instinct to be extremely careful with innovations in program design when the consequences affect the children who participate in the program. But this conservatism is a double edge sword, protecting the youth

who participate in the program but perhaps denying them program innovations that would greatly improve their mentoring experience and outcomes.

O'Neill provided one possible solution to this dilemma: the philosophy of design research. Design research is born from the notion that theory alone is not enough to develop a successful system, that trial and error—very carefully studied—are the only ways to truly reach an optimal outcome.



Research Fellows and Practitioner Scholars of the 2010 SIYM

Design research attempts to merge program development and program assessment and evaluation in a way that most mentoring efforts do not.

O'Neill showed how design research influenced the many e-mentoring programs he has worked with in Canadian schools. In working with teachers and other educators on these classroom-based e-mentoring projects, the initial concept for the program is always grounded in theoretical work and previous research. But as the e-mentoring programs unfold over time, O'Neill carefully examines whether they are working, who they are working for, and how they are achieving their results, good or bad.

Several of his e-mentoring projects, such as one for history students on the development of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, have demonstrated many positive outcomes, helping history come alive for students and forging connections with professionals in the history field. But for SIYM participants, the critical lesson was in how design research improved the programs moving forward.

Based on his careful research of the projects, O'Neill was able to determine exactly how to change the program, in both large and

small ways, for optimal success. The small scale of his projects meant that they could afford to take bigger risks in how the program changed from year to year, something not always possible with large federally-funded mentoring initiatives or national-scale nonprofits. In the design research approach, programs are always being refined and studied, then refined and studied some more, in a constant cycle of innovation and examination.

The major benefit of the design research philosophy is that it is very good at highlighting what O'Neill called "tradeoffs," the often unintended

consequences of making changes in a system. For example, perhaps a mentoring program senses mentors and students are not getting enough support, so they dramatically increase match check-ins by staff. But that level of match support turns out to be labor intensive. The tradeoff for that increased focus on match check-ins may be far less time for mentor recruitment tasks, resulting in fewer mentors signing up and students languishing on a waiting list.

These types of unforeseen tradeoffs are a constant concern for mentoring program, especially those operating with limited staff or resources. A small change here or there might result in tradeoffs that hinder the program in meaningful ways. O'Neill believes that through a careful design research approach, local mentoring programs can figure out what works best for them, innovating where needed over time and building on previous success. O'Neill emphasized the importance of this constant program improvement toward the end of the SIYM with another metaphor: the lifecycle of a building.

"In the attempt to provide that solid foundation, we often deny programs the ability to "renovate," to change their nature over time to meet new needs or adapt to a changing environment."

All successful architecture projects have two things in common:

1) they begin from a solid floor plan that is appropriate for their

environment and use, and 2) they are adaptable over time. A house that does not fit in with the neighborhood, and is unable to be renovated for new uses, is unlikely to have a long life. The same is true for the mentoring movement, especially as the push toward adopting concrete "best practices" has gained momentum in recent years. All programs need a good foundation, and such best practices attempt to provide all mentoring programs with essentially the same solid "floor plan." But in the attempt to provide that solid foundation, we often deny programs the ability to "renovate," to change their nature over time to meet new

needs or adapt to a changing environment. O’Neill argues that only through careful study of program practices can we know how to renovate mentoring efforts for the long haul.

Computer-Mediated Communication as a New Frontier in Mentoring

It was during many of the presentations on e-mentoring throughout the SIYM that the real value in an interdisciplinary approach to understanding mentoring began to emerge. While e-mentoring and other technology-facilitated interventions have been part of the education and prevention field for some time, recent advances in what’s known as computer-mediated communication (CMC) have started to transform modern relationships at a rapid rate. The rise of platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, text messaging, and Twitter has created a constantly-changing landscape of human interaction and relationships. People are redefining what it means to be “friends” or to “know” somebody at a very fundamental level. This ongoing shift has profound implications for interventions like mentoring, which have a personal relationship at their core.

CARMIT-NOA SHPIGELMAN of Western Galilee College in Israel provided an excellent overview of CMC and how it is affecting the construction of relationships, with theory and examples drawn from her research into e-mentoring programs for students with disabilities in higher education settings. Most people think of CMC as being one type of communication, such as email. In reality, CMC encompasses a wide variety of communication platforms, ranging from simple things like text messaging or Twitter all the way to vibrant virtual worlds and societies, such as those found in the online environments of Second Life or The Sims. These platforms are constantly changing as technology grows more powerful—



email, which seemed life-altering less than a decade ago, is already being phased out by younger generations in favor of more real-time CMC platforms, such as chat. This creates a daunting environment for practitioners in the mentoring field, as it can be hard to determine how these tools are impacting youth, let alone figuring out ways to build them into the mentoring experience.

Shpigelman connected the worlds of CMC and mentoring by discussing the “pathways of support” that CMC can provide:

- Informational support
- Tangible assistance
- Task-based support
- Social support
- Emotional support

These ways of supporting an individual certainly spoke to the practitioners at the SIYM—they constitute the bulk of what a mentor in their programs tries to provide. And Shpigelman’s research into e-mentoring programs in university settings points to both similarities with traditional face-to-face mentoring and some inherent challenges in using CMC as a mentoring tool.

Her research has found that CMC can provide otherwise isolated individuals with substantial emotional and social support that they may not have received otherwise. This was especially true in the programs she has studied for students with disabilities. Not only did CMC provide this much needed support, but for those particular students also led to increased acceptance of their disability and, most importantly, created opportunities for what she termed “displays of competency” that would not have existed otherwise. Mentors, who often had disabilities themselves, relished the chance to be the one providing help, rather than receiving it. Mentees found empowerment in seeing how their mentors handled their disability and benefitted from the chance to bond with someone around issues that were central to their identity.

Shpigelman’s research also hinted at the often inherent challenges in using CMC in mentoring relationships. The text-heavy medium of most CMC creates barriers for youth or adults with low literacy (or computer skills). She spoke specifically about the challenges of those mentors and mentees in “reading” each other, in detecting the subtle nuances of human communication in a text-only environment (the use of emoticons apparently helps considerably with this). The fact that most of this communication was asynchronous was also a challenge—your mentor might not always be available via email when you need support the most. On the other hand, communication by email could be ever present, occurring constantly changing the boundaries of the relationship with respect to frequency of contact.

Surprisingly, while these virtual mentoring relationships were judged to be quite valuable by

mentors and mentees, the experience of having a CMC mentoring relationship seemed to only whet participants’ appetites. Most ultimately wanted face-to-face contact with their mentor or mentee, with several participants in her studies wound up seeking each other out for in-person meetings or doing video chat over Skype or similar platforms. At the most basic level, they shared pictures and audio recordings to put a face and a voice to the individual they were bonding with.

This desire for a more “personal” touch to the relationship struck a chord with many SIYM participants. In their face-to-face mentoring programs, they often have participants wanting to communicate via email or chat. Some programs allow this, others do not. But when CMC is the *only* option, it may create the desire for in-person contact. This led SIYM participants to speculate if this accelerated technological change will lead to a point where CMC is part of almost every personal relationship, mentoring or otherwise. Our physical and virtual selves are beginning to merge in a way, leading Keller to conclude that “It’s becoming clear that with mentoring you can’t have one type of relationship without the other. Mentoring relationships will increasingly need to be able to work effectively in both in-person and computer-mediated environments.”

Another insight provided by Shpigelman was the large amount of work it takes to manage and support CMC relationships. In her research, the success of the program was dependent on the mentoring coordinator providing discussion prompts and other relationship support. Many think of e-mentoring as being inherently easier or less labor-intensive than traditional mentoring, but Shpigelman emphasized that these virtual relationships are still

“Mentees found empowerment in seeing how their mentors handled their disability and benefitted from the chance to bond with someone around issues that were central to their identity.”

very much program-based, meaning the program still has major responsibilities to provide guidance and direction.

The importance of structuring and supporting e-mentoring relationships as rigorously as face-to-face mentoring relationships was reinforced in a presentation by **PEG BOYLE SINGLE** on her own studies of e-mentoring in higher education and career environments. Her research underscored the importance of mentoring coordinators “adding value” to e-mentoring relationships. This value added could come in the form of weekly discussion prompts, occasionally providing information about careers options or on-campus events, troubleshooting problems in a match, or even offering jokes and humor—anything to get the mentor and mentee talking to each other and engaged with the program. In many e-mentoring programs, participants are unlikely to see the coordinator frequently, if ever, making constant check-ins and prompts a critical aspect of keeping participants engaged and motivated.

According to Single’s research, when coordinators do these things, they facilitate the power of e-mentoring to encourage women to pursue careers in science, engineering, and other male-dominated fields. In her study of the MentorNet program, which matched several thousand graduate and undergraduate women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) with an experienced mentor, she found that the program significantly increased participants’ motivation to seek or stay in jobs in that field. Single thus sees e-mentoring as something that can “level the playing field” for women in certain careers.

In both Single’s STEM example and Shpigelman’s research on e-mentoring for university students, we see that e-mentoring can be a powerful tool for encouraging and empowering individuals who may



feel like “outsiders” within a given system. E-mentoring provides a way for otherwise isolated individuals to feel a sense of community and to display their competence in ways they might not be able to otherwise. It is interesting to note that while the “e” part of these programs helps participants overcome barriers and provides easy access to support systems, the “mentoring” piece still demands program structure and a mentoring coordinator that is coaching, guiding, and proactively enhancing the mentoring experience.

Many of the 2010 SIYM participants were struck by these similarities in both purpose and structure. There was considerable discussion of the idea that although mentoring might be offered through different systems and technologies, and with radically different purposes, there may be elements that look the same across the wide spectrum of mentoring. Indeed, discovering and understanding these commonalities is one of the overarching goals of Keller’s new CIMR project, and the SIYM provided a glimpse into the value in comparing and contrasting a wide range of mentoring contexts.

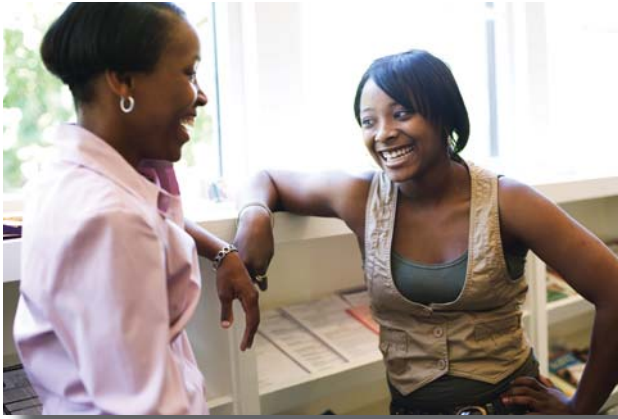


Photo provided by Friends of the Children, Photographer Michael McDermott

Insights from Workplace Mentoring and Alternative Mentoring Models

Further exploring this interdisciplinary theme was **SUSAN MURPHY**, recently named Director of Strategic Leadership Studies James Madison University. Murphy's first presentation focused on her research into mentoring programs in corporate settings. Immediately, participants started to notice connections between her research and the world of youth mentoring.

One such insight related to the motivations of participants in the workplace mentoring program she studied. Murphy's research revealed three main reasons why participants signed up:

- *Career support* – Hoping their mentor could help them up the career ladder
- *Psychosocial support* – Wanting a mentor to be their confidant or just a shoulder to cry on
- *Communal support* – Desiring a group experience, signing up for the mentoring program to meet the other program participants and engage in group activities through the program

Murphy's research further illustrated that when participants were matched with someone who

shared their motivation they were more likely to report satisfaction with the mentoring experience and greater career satisfaction overall. Those who were incompatibly matched did not fare as well. In those instances, the career-focused mentors did not provide the emotional support their protégées may have needed, and the more “friendship”-oriented mentors frustrated those protégées looking only for someone to help them move on in their career.

This need to align mentor and mentee motivation certainly echoes much of the research that has been done to date on “types” of youth mentoring relationships and the need to align mentor and mentee expectations. It seems intuitive, but in both youth and workplace mentoring, there needs to be a shared understanding of the purpose of the relationship and how the activities the pair engages in work toward that purpose. Murphy's research was from many years ago, and focused on adult employees in Fortune 1000 companies, yet this need for alignment of motivations and goals sounded remarkably similar to ideas on youth mentoring relationships published quite recently.¹

Murphy also presented research on an alternative youth mentoring model that is not currently widely employed but has been gaining traction in recent years: team mentoring. In this mentoring approach, a group of youth is matched with a group of mentors who all work together in choosing activities, leading discussions, and providing support. Often in these programs youth will have a one-to-one match with a mentor, but all the activities are group in nature and the youth have access to all of the mentors throughout the program.

In Murphy's view, this team approach has several advantages over traditional pure one-to-one mentoring:

- It allows for access to a diverse set of mentors who bring different skills, abilities, and personalities to the program

¹See Karcher, M. J., & Nakkula, M. J. (2010). Youth mentoring with a balanced focus, shared purpose, and collaborative interactions. *New Directions in Youth Development*, 126, for a recent discussion on these issues of relationship mutuality and focus (available for download at www.crossagepeermentoring.com)

- It provides support even when a mentor is unable to make a session—the group nature means that no youth is ever without some access to a mentor’s support
- It can be less expensive, especially in school settings, as elements like match supervision become less labor-intensive because of the group nature of the program

SIYM participants were intrigued by the concept of youth having access to multiple mentors, even if they had some sort of formal one-to-one match.

O’Neill provided some additional support for the importance of having access to multiple mentors from one of his previous e-mentoring projects. In that program, students were matched one-to-one with a mentor, but all correspondence took place in a forum-style platform, where participants could read all of the mentor-mentee interactions. What he found was that access to all these other mentors reduced the chance of a youth not getting what they needed from the program. Even if their mentor was, what he termed, a “dud mentor,” youth were still getting good advice and support from others in the online community. Seeing all the other mentors’ responses also motivated mentors to put a lot of time and effort to what they posted—they did not want to be the “dud.” O’Neill termed this approach “mentoring in the open” and it was fascinating to see the similarities between observations from his e-mentoring experience years ago and the outcomes of this team mentoring approach finding success in today’s urban schools.

Perhaps the most interesting element of team mentoring programs is their frequent reliance on some sort of curriculum to guide match activities.

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The team approach inherently means less time for one-to-one interaction, so most match activities are structured group experiences. This places pressure on program staff to provide activity ideas and resources, and somewhat reduces the youths’ ability to have a voice or choice in what they do with the mentors. The hope is that the constant availability of diverse mentors in the group environment overcomes the somewhat directed or rigid nature of the program activities (another of those tradeoffs O’Neill spoke of).

While this reliance on set curriculum may be a disadvantage to the team approach, it also potentially opens the door for some quite positive instrumental mentoring. If the youth are sufficiently engaged with the mentors, the use of a curriculum might provide structure and focus that mentees (especially at the older end of the spectrum) might find comforting and rewarding. Murphy noted that the TEAMWORKS (Los Angeles) program she has studied builds a highly-successful leadership development component into the program activities. The group format is the perfect environment to build leadership qualities and practice newly acquired leadership skills. The group provides a safe, supportive, diverse place to explore leadership, and building in these tasks through a structured curriculum seems rather natural, not like a “prescriptive” add-on by the program.

These diverse presentations provided SIYM participants with data, theory, and critical perspectives from the worlds of higher education mentoring, career mentoring, e-mentoring, leadership development, and many other disciplines. Yet in spite of this research diversity, there were several obvious threads connecting it all: the need for match

closeness and mutuality; the desire for both face-to-face interaction and computer-mediated communication; the tension between having a relationship with meaning but also just enough pure fun for it to be an enjoyable long-term experience. And above all, the critical role that program staff play in guiding and enhancing the experience for participants. Through this cross-discipline dialogue, it seemed as if some deep truths about mentoring, and mentoring programs, were beginning to emerge.

The Use of Multi- and Social-Media in Training and Supervising Mentors and Supporting Program Staff

While much of the technology-related discussion at the 2010 SIYM was focused on its impact on mentoring *relationships*, the impact of technology on program staff and systems was also at the front of participants' minds. While technology may be making some program management tasks easier, there are always those pesky trade-offs whenever technology solutions are implemented. And the rapid pace of technological change can make it difficult for programs to know how and when to use technology appropriately. But there were several presentations that highlighted how technology is being used to support mentoring program staff and structure:

- **MICHAEL KARCHER** a professor of education from UT–San Antonio, who has been a mainstay at the SIYM events over the years, provided a highly-instructive presentation on the use of pop culture multimedia in the training of mentors. In his school-based mentoring projects, Karcher builds training for mentors that draws from movies such as *The Jungle Book*, *The Lion King*, and *The Shawshank Redemption*. It was interesting to see theoretical concepts of mentoring relationships being illustrated so

clearly in movies like *The Jungle Book*, where the contrasting styles of Bagheera and Baloo (as “mentors” helping the young boy, Mowgli safely leave the jungle) essentially reflect “goal-directed” and “relational” interactions that become instrumental (rather than prescriptive) and developmental styles once they become more collaborative. These common media examples of the key approaches of successful mentors that are so thoroughly discussed in the youth mentoring literature.

Karcher used several other examples from popular movies and music, and suggested that this media can be a powerful way of conveying important concepts to mentors during training. As he noted, “when you experience some of the emotions conveyed in these scenes, it kind of just grabs you at a level that our training manuals simply cannot reach, and it can help youth internalize the messages, such as the mentees’ need for closure, being conveyed” This type of multimedia training may be especially effective for peer mentors, grounding them in familiar characters and viscerally illustrating concepts that may be hard to understand.

- **ERICA GOLDMAN & ELLEN MAHONEY** from the iMentor program in New York provided some insights into how they use technology to manage the thousands of e-mentoring relationships their program facilitates. Their proprietary technology allows staff to monitor the CMC between mentors and youth, with program staff weighing in occasionally to offer tips to the mentor or providing kudos for responding to a youth’s problem in a developmentally positive way. They can even have the system flag certain words or phrases, such as “suicide” or “got pregnant,” alerting the match supervisor that there may be a serious youth need (or mentor misbehavior) that requires immediate attention.

Needless to say, this level of match monitoring

is quite a bit more intensive than in traditional one-to-one mentoring programs, where the coordinator is left to ask participants how things have been going after the fact. This type of real-time monitoring could provide mentors and youth with increased programmatic support, allowing the program to respond more effectively to crisis and ensuring that mentors take an appropriate approach to helping youth through problems. But it also might inhibit the nature of the conversation, leaving participants reluctant to discuss difficult issues. iMentor's internal evaluations have not found this level of monitoring to be a deterrent to conversations, a finding Shpigelman agreed with based on her own e-mentoring evaluation experiences. In e-mentoring contexts, it may be more harmful to the development of matches to have a coordinator who is not engaged enough, rather than one who is overly involved.

- Several of the leading national training, technical assistance, and advocacy organizations also presented on technology-driven support mechanisms for program staff. **KIM ROQUE** from MENTOR provided an overview of many of the online supports they offer for mentoring professionals, including the MentorPRO data tracking system and emphasizing the new series of webinars being offered around the revised Elements of Effective Practice. **NICKY MARTIN & MICHAEL GARRINGER** of the National Mentoring Center at Education Northwest provided an overview of a new video-based mentor training course and highlighted the Mentoring Forums, a website where youth mentoring practitioners can gather to discuss hot topics and share ideas. These webinars and online “communities of practice” are helping disseminate best practices and practitioner wisdom at a rate that was unthinkable even 15 years ago. More information on these can be found at www.educationnorthwest.org.

- **GARY KOSMAN** from American Learns shared a wealth of information about his online mentor and tutor support system. Program coordinators use the America Learns software platform to track participant interactions—as mentors and tutors fill out their activity logs, they provide rich data to the program about the nature of their interactions with youth. The activity log template provides several prompts for the volunteer to detail their successful strategies in supporting youth, as well as several prompts for the volunteer to ask questions or seek advice. The database-driven America Learns platform then responds to the volunteer's questions in real time, emailing them corresponding tips and suggestions previously submitted by other users of the system.

This type of interactive support has tremendous potential, creating a repository of commonly-asked questions and an easily-accessed database of field-tested tips and strategies. Because the platform lets users see successful strategies from other participating America Learns sites across the nation, the knowledge gained by a mentor in rural North Carolina is instantly available to a tutor in the Bronx.

Of course, a system like this is only as good as the information going into it, and Kosman was quick to emphasize the importance of information management and appropriate data entry. Users need to be provided with training on using the system and entering information properly. For the system to have value, volunteers *must* submit successful strategies when they have them and not be afraid to ask for support when they need it. And, of course, the program itself needs to be able to support the technology and manage their data.

So while robust software such as America Learns can make match support or other tasks more efficient, it also creates other challenges and contingencies—once again, that theme of “tradeoffs,” the notion that while technology-driven innovations may be tremendously beneficial to mentoring programs, they likely do not reduce the overall time and effort needed to run a quality program. SIYM participants noted that those tradeoffs are always there if one looks hard enough.

Bringing It All Together: How Is Technology Influencing the Ethics of Youth Mentoring?

One of the big highlights for participants at the 2010 SIYM was the attendance of **JEAN RHODES**, Professor of Psychology at University of Massachusetts–Boston and a leading scholar in the youth mentoring field. Rhodes has authored such seminal works as *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth*, and has provided the field with invaluable research on the importance of match quality and duration and the multiple processes that make mentoring an effective change mechanism.

Rhodes provided an excellent summary of this research, and the research of others, including some valuable new insights about the importance of closing matches appropriately and the dangers of rematching youth whose relationships had ended early. But it was Rhodes' presentation on ethical standards in mentoring that really brought the reality of the technology theme home for many SIYM participants.

Rhodes began with an overview of her and colleagues' *Ethical Guidelines for Youth Mentoring* (see sidebar), which attempts to provide a set of standards for volunteers working with youth in a mentoring context.

Ethical Guidelines for Youth Mentoring

- Promote the safety and welfare of the young person
- Be trustworthy and responsible
- Act with integrity
- Promote justice for young people
- Respect the young person's rights and dignity

From Rhodes, J., Liang, B., & Spencer, R. (2009). First do no harm: Ethical principles for youth mentoring relationships. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 40, 452-458.

Rhodes then led participants through a series of technology-themed scenarios that tested these ethics:

- Your 15-year-old mentee “friends” you on Facebook, and as you look at her posted photos you see some where she is holding a beer at a party. What do you say? Who do you tell? Has the youth even “disclosed” anything to their mentor in this scenario?
- Your mentee has been leaning on you for a lot of support lately, but has been getting upset when you don't respond quickly to their late-night texts. You don't want to cut off this new form of communication—it seems to really be helping you bond—but the amount of texting is becoming burdensome.
- Halfway through the program year, a coordinator stumbles across a mentor's Facebook page, which contains links and images that are violent, racist, or otherwise seriously questionable. This mentor has been doing great in the program, and there seem to be no issues... What do you do with this information?

These and other scenarios led to some lively discussion and often striking differences of opinion on how these technology-themed scenarios should be handled. The SIYM attracts experienced, highly-professional mentoring practitioners, yet there was often little consensus in the room on how to properly address these circumstances. This illustrated just how stressful these rapid technology changes can be for mentoring coordinators in terms of their impact on mentor-mentee communication, staff roles and responsibilities, and program policy development.

In addition to the ethics and obligations of mentors, there was also discussion about ethics for program staff and for program development itself.

We considered questions such as:

- When can mentoring programs deviate from established “best practices?” Are there ethical considerations in developing a mentoring program that does things differently or tries an unproven practice? If there are, who gets to decide when that ethical line is crossed?
- Does technology-based mentoring, such as e-mentoring, set up literacy barriers (both reading literacy and computer literacy) that deny some youth the opportunity to participate? How big of an ethical concern is that? Is it ethical youth development if it deepens the “digital divide?”
- Do we allow programs enough time to develop infrastructure before evaluating them for success? Are there ethics to explore around how we measure and define “success” in youth mentoring programs?
- What role do funders and policymakers have in creating successful ethically-grounded mentoring efforts? Are there ethical considerations in defining the types of models that get funded or determining how long funding lasts?



Listening to these ethical discussions, one could tell that the youth mentoring field is one that has been through a lot of change in the last decade or so: funding has flourished and waned; research has unearthed both concrete evidence of mentoring success and troubling new questions; and increased public attention on mentoring has generated more volunteers but also created greater scrutiny of programs than ever before. And all the while, technology has become an increasingly important, and misunderstood, part of the equation, both for programs and the relationships they facilitate. These ethical questions are unlikely to be answered soon, but events like the 2010 SIYM prove that they are questions well worth asking and debating.



Moving Forward

At the end of a rapid-fire week of lectures, presentations, discussions, and late-night entertaining, SIYM participants were left with several emergent themes:

- Technology is here to stay in mentoring relationships and programs, so we'd better study its use and make sure that it is integrated into the mentoring experience, not used as a replacement.
- Only by carefully studying our programs over time can we figure out how to improve them and understand the inherent tradeoffs in any program change.
- Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers all have a role to play in moving the youth mentoring field forward. Several participants noted that a dialogue with policymakers and funders is the next logical step from an event like the SIYM, and an idea that Keller is already considering for 2011.

- There is much to be gained by comparing and contrasting traditional youth mentoring with other mentoring contexts (workplace, higher education) and delivery systems (e-mentoring, team mentoring). There seem to be many emerging concepts that tie all forms of mentoring together.

The interdisciplinary approach to the 2010 SIYM—and Keller's belief that these different fields could speak to and learn from each other—facilitated a unique and valuable exchange of ideas for participants. Hopefully events like the SIYM can spark a series of Wright brothers-esque inspirations and innovations that will forge positive and bold new directions for the youth mentoring field.

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