In This Issue . . .

...we review a recent conference that brought mentoring researchers and practitioners together to discuss issues of diversity in mentoring, highlighting key findings and best practices that can benefit U.S. Department of Education–funded mentoring programs.

We also have included an interview with Dr. Tom Keller of Portland State University, one of the leading minds in the youth mentoring field (see page 3).

The Pub Hub (beginning on page 4) features a number of resources available from the MRC Lending Library. This issue focuses on resources that speak directly to young people—and those who work with them—through their own words and experiences, offering both inspiration and practical tools for growth.

Issues of Diversity in Youth Mentoring

**Mentoring Leaders Gather To Explore the Nuances of Race, Culture, Disability, Developmental Stage, and Community in Youth Mentoring**

Mentoring is an activity that brings together individuals from varying cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, and personal backgrounds. From the earliest efforts of Big Brothers Big Sisters more than 100 years ago to provide guidance to boys from impoverished circumstances, to the current flourishing of mentoring in thousands of schools and community organizations, the act of mentoring has been one that brings together worlds that don’t often connect. In fact, much of the power of mentoring springs from the diversity of its participants—often, the exposure to another person’s worldview and life experiences is exactly what makes us grow ourselves.

But issues of diversity in mentoring have also caused some degree of concern and confusion over the years, especially as program-based mentoring has expanded in the United States. Because mentors often come from very different backgrounds than the young people they mentor, this type of support can shine a light on divisions of race, gender, culture, and identity that exist in our larger society. Youth mentoring programs of all types, including U.S. Department of Education grantees, struggle with the practical questions raised by issues of diversity:
Should we match youth only with mentors of the same racial, ethnic, and cultural background?

Do boys need a male mentor to benefit from the experience?

Does mentoring “work,” or not, for certain populations of youth?

What type of person makes a good mentor? And for whom?

How do we train mentors to work effectively with youth from backgrounds vastly different than their own?

Can our diverse society ever find agreement on the purpose and role of a mentor, or do we let groups define the concept of mentoring differently?

While there are no easy answers to these questions, a group of researchers and mentoring practitioners recently gathered to discuss what we do know about how our individual and collective diversity impacts mentoring programs and relationships. Many of the findings and discussions from this event will have meaning for Department of Education grantees as they conceptualize their programs and implement their services.

The second annual Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring, held July 28–August 1 on the campus of Portland State University (PSU), drew 40 participants from 14 states and the nations of Canada and New Zealand. The Institute, organized by Dr. Tom Keller at PSU (see sidebar, page 3), provides leading mentoring researchers and experienced professionals with an opportunity to share ideas and discuss critical issues in the youth mentoring field.

What emerged over the course of five days was a deeper understanding about the role personal identity, life experience, and heritage play in how mentoring relationships are formed and how programs support those relationships over time. The presentation of specific research findings, and the experiences from the field shared by participants, reinforced a truth sometimes lost in the rush to provide mentoring to increasingly narrowly defined youth populations: each mentoring participant and relationship is unique. While mentoring does have commonly agreed-upon best practices, the diversity of its participants insists that one size does not ultimately fit all.

The Institute was opened by Dr. Keller, who set the tone with what would be one of the major themes of the week: the interplay between research and practice and how that influences our understanding of how mentoring works at the program and personal levels. Mentoring practices—the strategies devised by thousands of local programs in an effort to help youth—tend to drive what gets researched and the questions researchers attempt to answer. While this system of practice before research provides constant innovation to the field, it also tends to put the proverbial cart in front of the horse. When examining the role of diversity in mentoring, Dr. Keller warns that we must be careful to avoid only looking at “confirming evidence” at the expense of findings that do not support our preconceived notions of what is effective for certain groups of youth. As he put it to the group, “mentoring runs the risk of holding onto its beliefs.”

Dr. Jean Grossman, Senior Vice President for Research at Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), expanded on this call to rethink our assumptions with two presentations examining both her extensive research into Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) programs and the work of several colleagues. Dr. Grossman’s research on the outcomes of Big Brothers Big Sisters’ community-based model continues to be the most widely quoted evidence of mentoring’s efficacy, highlighting improvements in school attendance, peer and family relations, and several other behavioral areas.

But when one examines these outcomes in relation to the diverse characteristics of the youth participants, a more nuanced picture emerges (see Figure 1, page 6). For example, girls in the study, specifically minority girls, seemed to benefit in many more areas than boys did. Grossman offered many hypotheses for this disparity in outcomes. First, boys and girls come to mentoring programs for very different reasons. Boys are often referred because they lack a male role model, while girls tend to be referred for a much broader set of needs. Girls might have simply had more areas of need that were better addressed through mentoring activities. Or they just may have had needs that matched the
Interview: Dr. Tom Keller
Portland State University

For the past two years, Dr. Tom Keller of Portland State University has organized the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring, a unique professional development opportunity for experienced mentoring professionals. Through the Institute, and his own research and writing—including a chapter in the Handbook of Youth Mentoring—Dr. Keller has emerged as a leading voice in the mentoring field, bridging the gap between academia and program practices in the field. We sat down with Dr. Keller recently to discuss his work and his thoughts on “what’s next” in mentoring.

Mentoring Resource Center: Could you tell our readers a little bit about how you got into mentoring and the current position you hold at Portland State University?

Tom Keller: I was a caseworker, supervisor, and program director for Big Brothers of King County (Seattle) from 1992 to 1997. During that time, we relied almost entirely on the wisdom of experienced staff members for program development and delivery. I was always intrigued by the challenge of understanding mentoring relationships and learning lessons from very skillful mentors. After getting my PhD and becoming a professor at the University of Chicago, I began to do research on both school-based and community-based mentoring relationships.

I recently had the wonderful opportunity to become the Duncan & Cindy Campbell Professor in the School of Social Work at Portland State University. This is the first endowed professorship in the nation with a focus specifically on youth mentoring. PSU has a strong emphasis on community engagement, and the professorship was created with the mandate to develop a program that integrates research, education, and community involvement in the field of youth mentoring. I really appreciate this opportunity to bring both my practice knowledge and academic training to work with agencies to improve youth mentoring.

MRC: How did you come up with the idea for the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring?

TK: I wanted to develop a distinctive forum for linking research and practice. My aim was to avoid duplicating the excellent training resources already in existence and also to leverage the advantages of the university setting. It seemed there were many training opportunities for people just getting started in mentoring but not much offered for more experienced professionals who develop and manage programs, yet I knew these leaders in the field were interested in learning about the latest research.

On the other side of the equation, I knew that researchers would appreciate not only an opportunity to share their research with those who could really put it to use but also a chance to better understand the issues and challenges of actual program operations. The idea was to encourage an in-depth, sustained dialogue between researchers and professionals in an intensive, week-long seminar. The small-group format permits a much deeper and richer discussion of the research and its implications for programs, and it also fosters relationships between researchers and professionals.

MRC: What do you feel were the major themes that emerged from this year’s Institute?

As you note in the summary in this issue, there were many interesting and informative discussions about the complexity of mentoring relationships and the inability to designate a particular model that will work universally. My attempt to draw a basic, cross-cutting theme during the week led me to this conclusion: “Mentors should be learners rather than teachers.”

Continued on page 7
In this back-to-school edition of the Pub Hub, we feature many resources created for and by young people, some as sheer inspiration and others offering practical tools to help youth take leadership roles in their communities or guide them in self-reflection.

These and hundreds of other resources are available through the MRC Lending Library at http://www.edmentoring.org/lending_library.html. Please contact Michael Garringer (garringm@nwrel.org) or Kay Logan (logank@nwrel.org) if you have any questions about searching or using the collection.


You may recognize Hill Harper from the CBS drama series, *CSI: NY*, but what you may not know is that he has found a new voice as an author, an inspirational speaker to young people, and a leader in promoting mentoring. In addition to his accomplishments as an actor, he is a graduate of Harvard Law School with a second graduate degree from the Kennedy School of Government. He is a spokesperson for *Essence* Magazine’s Essence Cares campaign and has appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to report on the lives of young men in juvenile detention.

Designed as a series of letters to a fictional younger brother and based on his conversations with youth around the country, *Letters to a Young Brother* addresses many of the challenges young men face today. Topics cover such far-ranging issues as graduating, setting goals, friendships, responsibility, family life, being raised by a single mom, materialism, finances, drinking, cars, gossip, and more.

Much of the success of this book with young audiences results from its tone—each letter gives the feeling that it is being written directly to the reader. Hill also solicits advice and inspiration from many influential friends, including Senator Barack Obama, producer Jerry Bruckheimer, rap artist Nas, NFL player Curtis Martin, and Harvard Law Professor Charles Ogletree, Jr. The messages he drives home most strongly are belief in self, responsibility for oneself, and the value of education. *Letters to a Young Brother* won two NAACP awards, and was named a Best Book for Young Adults by the American Library Association in 2007. [http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17757](http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17757)


The success of *Letters of a Young Brother* led Harper to take on speaking engagements to groups of young people around the country, and it wasn’t long before young women in Harper’s audiences started to ask him if he had any big-brotherly advice for them. As the author states in his introduction: “But why ask me? Because I was a man? …I started to learn things I had never thought about, such as the fact that many young women derive elements of their self-esteem from their fathers. In a time when nearly two-thirds of ethnic girls are raised in fatherless households, where do those girls get their self-esteem? How do they develop healthy, platonic relationships with men? When do they get to hear a loving, supportive male voice?”

*Letters to a Young Sister* delves into the complexity of growing up female. Harper’s belief that girls and young women struggle with significant and often hidden problems even as they appear to be succeeding in life (getting great grades but hating their bodies; being popular but hiding the problems they face at home) led him to offer more detailed advice on a wider range of issues than his book for young men. Topics are discussed in depth and include gossip, dating, self-esteem, body image, family, dealing with sexism and racism, depression, staying out of debt, and how boys should treat you.

As with *Letters to a Young Brother*, this book is articulate and literary, with frequent references to African American historians and thinkers, as well as current cultural icons, to bring home the author’s messages. [http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17758](http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17758)

This enthusiastic book for middle school girls is filled with activities, guidance, and resources to help girls be “strong, smart and bold” (the Girls Inc. slogan) while avoiding the pressure to be “perfect.” The book is designed for girls to use individually, but many of the activities could be adapted for use with mentoring matches or groups of girls.

The book was inspired by Girls Inc.’s 2006 survey and resulting report, The Supergirl Dilemma, in which more than one thousand girls shared their stories. Chapters include dealing with stereotypes, looks, school, friends, dating, relationships, family, stress, talents, setting priorities, budgeting, tough breaks, and more. Each chapter includes activities, insights from other girls and women role models, and tips to help girls feel good about who they are. A great list of Web sites on various issues of concern to girls is also provided.

http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17795

If your program is looking for resources that kids can use to plan their own service projects, you might want to take a look at some of these guides from Free Spirit Publishing, which has been producing books for teens and younger kids on service and character education for the past 25 years:

A Kids’ Guide to Helping Others Read & Succeed: How to Take Action!
This resource is intended as a self-directed guidebook for youth, grades six and up, who want to set up a peer tutoring program as a service project. The first section has general background on literacy, tutoring, and working with younger children. The second section helps youth get started, and includes a template for a service-learning proposal.
http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17712

The Kid’s Guide to Service Projects: Over 500 Service Ideas for Young People Who Want to Make a Difference
This resource may be helpful for peer programs as a brainstorming tool of different ideas and activities for service projects. It is designed as a self-guided book for kids, with ideas running the gamut from environmental projects to working with senior citizens.
http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17709

The Teen Guide to Global Action: How to Connect with Others (Near & Far) to Create Social Change
Designed as a workbook for individual youth, some of the material from this resource could be adapted for use by peer mentoring programs seeking to design service projects. Included are useful checklists on identifying a cause, researching it, and planning for action. Areas of action covered are human rights, hunger and homelessness, and peace and friendship.
http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17710

Do You Have What It Takes? A Comprehensive Guide to Success After Foster Care by Teens Who Have Been There
edited by Kendra Hurley. 2007, Youth Communication.

This resource, written by current and former foster youth to prepare their peers both emotionally and practically for the challenge of living independently, should be of interest to any program serving youth in foster care. Each section starts with real-life experiences, followed by self-reflection and planning worksheets and a group activity. Words of encouragement are provided throughout. Subjects covered include managing money, finding and maintaining a job, finding housing, building a support system and health and hygiene.

The publisher, Youth Communication, is strongly committed to providing a public forum for youth to share their experiences. Check out their Web site, which features excerpts from their powerful online magazine, Represent, written by and for young people in the foster care system: http://www.youthcomm.org
http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/17783

Another book from this publisher that may also be of interest is The Heart Knows Something Different: Teenage Voices from the Foster Care System, a collection of over three dozen personal narratives by young writers that provides an insider’s account of growing up “in the system.”
http://intra.nwrel.org/cs/intra/view/dbo_Resource/11490
impact areas this evaluation measured. Girls may be more likely to have had other mentors, something that prepared them to benefit from these mentors in ways boys were not. And girls may have been more receptive to the type of relationship building activities encouraged by the program.

So while it may be true that mentoring can seem more effective for one group or another, the reasons behind those differences are very complex. Rather than drawing broad conclusions about mentoring’s efficacy for certain groups, Grossman encouraged closer analysis of evaluation results, thoroughly examining the “how” and “why” of mentoring’s impact on certain youth.

Dr. Grossman also contrasted her community-based mentoring data with findings from P/PV’s look at school-based mentoring programs. Comparing her work with Dr. Jean Rhodes (University of Massachusetts-Boston) to P/PV’s soon-to-be-published findings with Drs. Naida Silverthorn and David DuBois (University of Illinois-Chicago Circle) has led to the hypothesis that school-based mentoring works through different processes than community-based. School-based mentees’ outcomes seem to be tied to improved relationships with peers, something not found in their analysis of community-based mentoring data. This implies that program setting can impact not only what matches do together but also the very mechanisms that convert mentoring into change within the individual. In examining the role of participant diversity, we cannot forget that diverse program settings are also a strong factor.

Dr. Michael Karcher of the University of Texas–San Antonio also emphasized the role of program context in his two sessions. He presented findings from his work with Communities in Schools programs in 20 San Antonio schools. His research—mostly examining the impact of mentoring for Latino youth in elementary, middle, and high school—provides insight into the role of a school setting in how matches develop. Karcher found a large positive impact on school connectedness for mentored elementary age boys, but a significant decrease for high school age boys. Conversely, high school girls had large gains in connectedness after being mentored.

To explain these differences, Karcher examined how school settings varied at different grade levels and how that affected the activities matches engaged in. Elementary school matches, for example, had much more freedom to move around the school, spent more time engaged in games and playful activities, and spent far less time discussing youth problems such as grades or behavior. High school matches, on the other hand, spent their time in more confined spaces like the library or cafeteria, had less access to games and playtime, and spent much more time discussing “areas of improvement” for the mentee.

For high school boys, this prescriptive approach, combined with concepts of machismo in Latino culture that can make boys less receptive to help from others, cre-

### SUMMARY OF IMPACT FINDINGS BY SUBGROUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Outcome</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Minority Boys</th>
<th>Minority Girls</th>
<th>White Boys</th>
<th>White Girls</th>
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<tr>
<td>Initiate Drug Use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Initiate Alcohol Use</td>
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<td>Hit Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Grades</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skip a Day of School</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Acceptance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Relationship</td>
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Figure 1. An “x” notes areas where mentees had positive outcomes in Grossman’s study, additionally broken down by gender and minority status (parentheses indicate the outcome was not statistically significant). Note that specific impacts varied considerably among the diverse youth.

With regards to the boys, they mostly came to the program with more focused needs, namely a “father figure.” This also may have been the boys’ first exposure to this type of support, which might have hindered the results of this particular study but set the stage for highly successful mentoring relationships in the future.
In other words, mentors will be more effective at building a relationship and supporting a child when they begin with an attempt to really understand the individual child and the child’s circumstances, culture, and heritage. They should enter the process like an open-minded traveler with many questions and a sense of adventure. A child is more likely to feel understood and valued when treated as the expert on his or her life, with something meaningful to share with a curious adult. This approach could help to bridge whatever types of personal and social differences the mentor and child bring to the relationship.

MRC: You’ve focused on school-based mentoring and issues of diversity in mentoring in the first two Institutes. What are the other “hot topics” you see as being potential themes for future Summer Institutes?

TK: Developing the theme for each new Institute is really the creative part of the enterprise—it is both fun and challenging. In many ways, I get to be the match-maker once again, inviting colleagues who will offer interesting perspectives on a broad topic. I have a long list of potential themes: mentoring youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, mentoring through different developmental transitions, assessing the nature and quality of mentoring relationships, gender in mentoring, identifying evidence-based practices, etc. I’m not sure which topic will be featured next year; I’ll get serious about putting together the next program in a couple of months!

MRC: How would you describe the relationship between research and practice in the mentoring field? What can researchers do to help local programs? And conversely, what can local programs do to help researchers in their quest for understanding?

My answer to this question is much more optimistic after seeing the great level of engagement between researchers and mentoring professionals during the first two summer institutes. My research colleagues have been very enthusiastic about attending. They want their efforts to make a difference, and they also realize how much they can learn from the insights and practice wisdom of program leaders. Likewise, I have been thoroughly impressed with the mentoring professionals, who have been so eager and diligent in learning about the research and thinking about how it applies to their programs. I think the bridge between research and practice comes at the personal level—with professionals recognizing opportunities to make use of research and even to conduct research within their own programs and researchers thinking more about how their research can really help improve mentoring. I am planning to team up with a participant from the first Institute to develop more strategies and tools for making research relevant and valuable to programs and encouraging programs to use high-quality research.

2008 Research Fellows and Guest Speakers at the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring

Jean Grossman – Public/Private Ventures and Princeton University
Michael Karcher – University of Texas–San Antonio
Laurie Powers – Portland State University
Bernadette Sanchez – DePaul University
Belle Liang – Boston College University
Marcelo Diversi – Washington State University–Vancouver
ated an environment where they felt worse as a result of the mentors’ efforts. Said Karcher, “Sitting at a table in a high school cafeteria and talking with a boy about his problems in front of his peers is just not a good way to go. If I had to mentor a high school student, especially a boy, I would get out of the school environment and out into the community where I could have access to fun activities and more opportunity to make the mentee feel praised and valued.”

For high school programs that don’t let their matches leave campus, Karcher recommends providing matches with as much access to space and resources as possible. School-based mentoring programs should rethink the assumption that mentees need fewer fun activities and less casual conversation as they get older.

Continuing the themes of program setting and context, Karcher also shared research showing that staff activities made a significant difference in participant outcomes. The amount of time spent on match supervision directly affected mentors’ sense of efficacy and their level of commitment to their mentee. Mentors were more likely to view their relationships as positive, spent more time mentoring, and were more likely to continue mentoring the following year when staff were diligent about frequently interacting with them and when matches had access to a variety of school resources and activity options.

Karcher even found some evidence that those programs where staff went out of their way to form collaborative relationships with other school personnel were more likely to increase mentees’ sense of connectedness. Thus, school-based mentoring programs, especially peer programs, will want to spend considerable time supervising and supporting each match and working with other school staff to make sure mentors are welcomed on campus and that matches have an easy time finding fun activities to engage in.

When discussing issues of diversity in mentoring, we tend to focus on race and ethnicity, but Dr. Laurie Powers, Associate Dean for Research in the School of Social Work at Portland State University, provided two sessions examining the impact of mentoring on an often overlooked population: youth with disabilities. There is a dearth of research on providing mentoring to this population, but Dr. Powers has conducted many small-scale evaluations in this area, including the only experimental, randomly assigned study of mentoring for youth with disabilities.

Dr. Powers emphasized that programs need to adopt a self-determination framework when serving youth with disabilities. Many of the issues these young people confront relate to restricted access to opportunities, negative self-perceptions, and difficulties getting out and engaging in their communities in meaningful ways. A self-determination framework for mentoring builds on concepts of self-efficacy (the belief that one can achieve desired outcomes) and mastery motivations (the self-confidence that builds with repeated successes over time). Mentors can assist with this personal growth by providing opportunities to set and achieve goals and by demonstrating ways that youth with disabilities can more fully participate in their communities.

Dr. Powers shared the results from several of her studies, all of which produced significant outcomes for participants (many far greater than those found in other mentoring research). Mentored youth increased their feelings of self-determination, felt more confident about community participation, and reported enhanced skills and more effective planning for independent living. Even parents of the youth reported feeling more confident in their child’s abilities and an improved home life, suggesting that parent involvement may be a key to serving this population.

Powers stressed several best practices for serving youth with disabilities:

- Recognize that your program is likely already serving many of these youth. Encourage staff and mentors to view disability as another form of diversity and to recognize ways that accommodations benefit many youth for various reasons. Recognize the diversity within the broad category of disability.
Do not make generalizations about a mentor’s or mentor program’s capacities to serve youth based on diagnostic labels. Disability labels usually don’t predict how a particular child will respond to mentoring. Get to know the child.

Sometimes information about disability can be found in records, such as Individualized Education Plans. However, the most helpful information often comes from youth and their families or other trusted adults in their lives.

Programs should see disability as a functional issue: What do young people need assistance with in order to effectively navigate the world around them? What do they need assistance with to participate in your program? Conversations with youth, family members, and caregivers can be critical in gathering this information.

Provide training to mentors and staff on the diversity of supports and accommodations needed by the youth you serve. Avoid focusing on disability type or diagnosis. Understanding the specific nature of a child's strengths and support needs is the key to providing appropriate services and support.

Determine when a child might benefit from having a mentor with shared experience of functional challenges (for example, a child who has trouble reading and a mentor who had similar difficulty when in school). This is most appropriate when the youth requests it, or if the youth has limited access to adults with similar functional challenges, or if the youth has a negative self-image tied to disability, or if her goals might best be supported by a mentor with a shared life experience. A same-disability match might not be necessary if the youth already has pride in self, access to and knowledge of resources and support systems, or if she has goals and interests for mentoring that probably won’t be impacted by disability.

Partner with other community agencies that can provide support that is outside the scope of your own program. “Be clear about what you know and need to learn in serving these youth and reach out for information and technical assistance from other programs,” cautioned Powers.

And most important, build on a self-determination framework. One of Powers’ programs operationalized this by supporting development of positive, strengths-based match relationships that build trust and foster youth confidence and pride; building match activities around youth-stated goals; providing opportunities for youth to practice new skills in service of their goals; creating opportunities for mentors to interact with parents; and getting youth out into the community and interacting with individuals and organizations they would not have otherwise.

Much of the discussion that followed Dr. Powers’ presentations noted that this self-determination framework can easily be applied to all youth in mentoring programs as it focuses every aspect of the match on helping youth achieve their own goals, giving them ownership of the mentoring process and a stake in their own outcomes.

Many of the core issues of diversity in mentoring were addressed in two sessions led by Dr. Bernadette Sanchez of DePaul University, who has studied the role of race, ethnicity, and culture in both program-generated and natural mentoring relationships. Dr. Sanchez opened with a discussion about the risks and rewards of cross-race matches between mentor and mentee, something that is almost a necessity given the demographics of who gets mentored and who does the mentoring in the United States. Based on the particular outcomes that have been investigated so far, there is no strong evidence that same-race matches are generally more or less effective than cross-race ones.

The discussion around this issue indicated that factors other than race might be more important in matching: language compatibility (for effective communication), family circumstances (mentors can fill a gap in the young person's home life, such as an absent father), and shared values (common ground that cuts across race and personal background). As fellow
researcher Belle Liang expressed, "in the end, mentors must get the kid, regardless of their similarity of race or ethnicity."

Programs must also "get" the youth they serve. Dr. Sanchez shared an audio clip of one Mexican American high school mentee from her field research. The young man expressed great disappointment with the program he was in, which had gone out of its way to match him with a Mexican American mentor. Unfortunately, the youth was much more interested in having a mentor who could teach him about the world of business and help him reach his lofty career goals, and his mentor didn't have this kind of experience. This compelling testimony emphasized the need for programs to avoid simple, even stereotypical thinking when determining who might make a good match for a particular youth.

But Dr. Sanchez did review three aspects of diversity that research indicates strongly influence how mentors and mentees relate to one another and their potential for match success: cultural mistrust, cultural sensitivity, and ethno-cultural empathy. Her research shows that when either mentors or mentees have high levels of cultural mistrust their cross-race relationships are less youth-centered, less close, less helpful to the youth in addressing his or her problems, and are generally less satisfying. On the other hand, matches where participants have high levels of cultural sensitivity are more trusting and satisfying to both mentor and mentee. High levels of ethno-cultural empathy (the ability to see others' perspectives, acceptance and awareness of cultural differences) predicted higher levels of relationship satisfaction and an increase in mentees seeking out support from their mentors.

These findings have major implications for how mentoring programs make matches. Race, ethnicity, and culture are huge aspects of how we define ourselves as individuals, but it may be our level of acceptance and understanding of other races and cultures that determines our ability to connect in mentoring relationships. Programs should consider application or interview questions that attempt to gauge the level of cultural mistrust of participants (especially mentees, who are likely to have a less nuanced view of other cultures than adults) and use that information to help make appropriate matches and provide focused support as the relationships develop. See the next page for additional tips on addressing issues of race and culture in mentoring programs.

Both Dr. Sanchez and Dr. Belle Liang of Boston College University also discussed natural mentoring relationships over the course of the Institute. Dr. Liang believes that examining the mentors and relationships that youth naturally gravitate toward can help inform desirable qualities of mentors and relationships to be replicated in formal mentoring programs.

Dr. Liang has specifically examined how the desired characteristics of natural mentoring relationships evolve for youth as they get older. In general, youth of all ages want similar things from their mentors: trust, role modeling, opportunities for fun, a balance of connection and autonomy, and empowerment. But there are shifts in how some of these qualities play out over time. Early adolescents tend to choose mentors within their own families. As youth age, their relationships with extra-familial adults become more important and take on different characteristics. Older mentees—high school and college students—are looking less for specific types of empowerment, someone who can help them reach specific goals and prepare them for the challenges of adulthood. Older mentees may want more autonomy in decision-making, potentially creating tension between the desire for approval from the mentor and a desire to have their independence, decisions, and ideas respected. Whereas younger youth may be less averse to being treated as protégés under the tutelage of their mentors, older youth expect more reciprocal relationships with their mentors.

Programs can use this information by creating developmentally appropriate mentoring strategies for youth of different ages and encouraging long-term matches to adapt the nature of their relationships in response to mentees' developmental shifts over time. For elementary age youth, activities that emphasize the friendship itself may be essential in providing mentees a sense of caring and specialness. As youth get older and approach late adolescence, matches might change their focus to be more intentional about achieving specific goals, providing opportunities for mentees to spread their wings while conveying a sense of trust in mentees' judgment. The relationship may become less hierarchical and the mentee may view his mentor as more of a valued friend than as a caring authority figure.

But programs should also note that, as both Dr. Liang and Dr. Karcher stressed in their findings, the opportunity to have fun and a strong sense of trust are critical
components to any match regardless of the age of the mentee.

Implications for Department of Education Mentoring Grantees

So what does all this mean for U.S. Department of Education school-based mentoring grantees? While there are no magical answers to the issues of diversity in the field of youth mentoring, the following tips can help your program ensure that it is doing what it can to build meaningful relationships among diverse groups of participants:

- Learn as much as you can about each mentee that enters your program. What do they want out of their relationship? What is their home life like? What are their personal or cultural values? Do they have a disability or other special need that might impact their participation in the program? Do they have specific goals? While your program likely has many goals, you are most likely to achieve them if you help mentees reach their own goals by individualizing the mentoring experience for them.

- Learn about your mentors, as well. What are their motivations? Do they have high levels of cultural awareness or high levels of cultural mistrust? What type of youth might they truly "get?"

- Respect the diversity within diversity. As Dr. Sanchez pointed out, there are well over 100 distinct nationalities and ethnic groups that get labeled as “Hispanic” here in the United States. Be aware of the tremendous variance found within this and other broad categories.

- Provide mentors and mentees (and even program staff) with training in cultural competence and understanding. Be sure to emphasize skills for identifying and building on our similarities rather than focusing on our small differences.

- Monitor matches to see if cultural differences are causing problems. This was illustrated perfectly by Institute guest speaker Marcelo Diversi from Washington State University, who discussed his early efforts to create a mentoring program for Latino (mostly Roman Catholic) youth in the heavily Caucasian (and Mormon) state of Utah. In one example, he told of how his white mentors thought the youth were being disrespectful because they never looked them in the eye, not realizing that in the youths’ culture avoiding direct eye contact was actually a sign of showing respect. Identifying this problem and explaining the issue had a major impact on improving the mentor-mentee relationships.

- Decide how important aspects of cultural and racial identity are to your program. The most recent MRC Case Study on the Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Program in Tucson, Arizona, illustrated that sometimes a heavy emphasis on culture and identity can be powerful for youth and an entire community (http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/luz_study.pdf). But also keep in mind the budding entrepreneur in Dr. Sanchez’ study who was ineffectually matched with a Mexican American mentor based on ethnic criteria alone. Look at your program goals and the needs of your youth and decide how much of a role culture, race, and other demographics factor into what you want to achieve.

- Partner with other community agencies around issues of cultural awareness and understanding. Bring in speakers from appropriate organizations to work with your mentors. Find partners who can help your matches engage in culturally based activities they may not have access to otherwise. If mentoring can bring diverse people together for a common goal, it can bring diverse programs together as well.

You can learn more about the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring, and eventually download some of the presentations and handouts, on the Portland State University Web site at:
http://www.youthmentoring.ssw.pdx.edu/
News & Notes

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has released the 19th edition of its influential KIDS COUNT Data Book, available at http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/databook.jsp, continuing its annual state-by-state tracking of the well-being of the nation’s children. In addition to the data book itself, the Kids Count Web site has many useful features that have recently been updated, such as the new data center (KIDS COUNT Data Center) with powerful tools that allow you to look at more than 100 indicators of child well-being. Data are provided by state and they have added the 50 largest U.S. cities. It also is easier to access county- and community-level data through the foundation’s network of state and local providers (CLIKS database).

Included with this year’s edition of Kids Count is a special issue brief, A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform, which examines the juvenile justice system in America, especially timely given the mounting national debate surrounding the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act. The brief addresses many issues that are part of that debate, such as the fate of status offenders - youth who have entered the justice system for minor offenses or because they are homeless or truant. Programs should keep a sharp eye on this important legislation, as it may lead to a substantial restructuring of services to juvenile offenders and increased funding for youth-focused prevention and intervention efforts such as mentoring.

The brief also gives a good overview of the Annie E. Casey Foundation initiatives, now being tested in almost half the states, to provide alternatives to traditional juvenile detention facilities for non-violent offenders. The foundation has been a strong voice for refocusing national efforts on rehabilitation vs. punitive measures and youth advocates will be interested in the research they use to back up their viewpoint.