



An OPEN Discussion of Evidence Based Practice

By Tanya L. Ostrogorsky, OPEN Financial Officer

OPEN members gathered at Portland State University on March 31, 2004 to discuss issues related to the definition of evidence-based practice (EBP). Peter Hendrickson (Evergreen School District) opened the program. Nancy Koroloff (Portland State University Regional Research Institute), welcomed the group and expressed appreciation for OPEN's decision to hold this event at PSU. Next, Kari Greene (Trillium Family Services) highlighted the many current articles, position statements, pending legislation, etc., that prompted the OPEN Program Committee to address the topic of evidence-based practice.

Using a highly sophisticated method of random assignment to groups (counting by threes), small discussion groups were formed. Each group selected a moderator and recorder. Comments from the small group discussions raised ethical and methodological issues, which in turn inform our professional roles.

Ethical issues discussed concerned the implications of EBP for funding; service or treatment provision; questions of government vs. researcher interests; issues of community control; and possible negative effects on the types and quality of research that could be conducted under EBP rules.

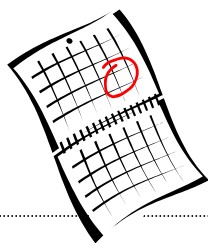
Many participants were concerned that EBP would influence future evaluation designs, which would likely become less capable of addressing complex problems, participatory, qualitative or exploratory research. There was also a concern that experimental and quasi-experimental designs can be problematic.

Other common issues of concern included that a more precise definition of evidence-based practice is needed. Questions raised included:

- Is EBP a recommendation or an edict?
- Do all Federal agencies use the same definition?
- What is the quality of evidence required?
- Is quasi-experimental design considered sufficient?
- Can the AEA Evaluation Standards help us with this?

Finally, how should OPEN as a professional organization address this topic? Suggestions focused on OPEN's role in educating stakeholders, producing position statements, and similar activities. Our charge should be to educate legislators and other policy makers, program personnel and service providers, who have different perspectives on EBP. OPEN should produce a position paper and public statements on the evaluator's perspective and ethical obligations and organize workshops and discussions with policy makers and practitioners.

Overall, it was a lively and spirited debate from a large and very diverse group of program evaluators.



Making Sure your Evaluation is Used

Come join OPEN members to discuss this issue:

Date: June 4, 2004

Where: Multnomah County Building, 501 SE Hawthorne

Time: 12:00 – 1:30

OPEN collaborates with WERA

By Peter Hendrickson, OPEN Program Chair

The Washington Educational Research Association (WERA) and OPEN have recently completed a draft for review by their boards of a White Paper on Criteria To Evaluate Products and Services to Prepare K-12 Students For High Stakes Testing.

One of the handmaidens of high stakes testing in a free market economy is opportunity for entrepreneurs, large and small, to sell test preparation products and services. The at least implicit promise is that purchase and use of the products/services will result in elevated scores. Many school districts, schools, and individual teachers commit fiscal and time resources to raise scores. These interventions may extend for weeks or months, gaining de facto program, if not curriculum, status.

Selection of curriculum materials has become increasingly sophisticated and districts are beginning to eliminate from consideration those materials without a credible research base validating their effectiveness to impact student achievement. Requirements in the No Child Left Behind legislation will sharpen this practice. There are no such standards for selection of test preparation programs and there is scant evidence that any test preparation program improves what students know and are able to do beyond what other curriculum and instruction produce.

WERA has a tradition of gathering thoughtful practitioners and researchers together on high profile learning and assessment issues to influence policy and provide guidance to practitioners. OPEN has a history of supporting the community of program evaluators while seeking to improve program evaluation practice in the Northwest. Their joint White Paper on this topic addresses, at least, the following issues:

- *What data support the efficacy of high stakes test preparation programs?*
- *What criteria and process might educators use in selecting or eliminating test preparation programs?*
- *What guidelines, ethical and pedagogical, are there for use of test preparation programs?*
- *What standards are there for the use of test preparation programs?*
- *Develop and test guidelines and standards applicable to high stakes K-12 testing.*

The paper is expected to be published by WERA this summer with support from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. It will be posted on both web sites and available in hard copy to OPEN members at the Annual Fall Conference.

President's Message

Hello to all OPEN Members and Friends and Happy Spring,

The OPEN Council and Committee members have been working hard, and having fun too, to organize stimulating and engaging events and activities for this year. These volunteers are using feedback from the member survey and from previous events to identify those topics, speakers, and formats of greatest interest to the membership. For example, this year's events include networking opportunities as well as technical support and skill-building presentations. In addition, the Annual Fall OPEN Conference will be expanded this year to include both an intensive workshop with a keynote speaker, as well as a day of shorter workshops on varied topics.

The first quarterly OPEN meeting, held on March 31st, was a forum for discussing "What constitutes scientific evidence?," a particularly relevant policy question in the current historical context in Oregon and the United States as a whole, as the importance of research and evidence-based practice gains the notice of policy makers. The larger question is how public policy may shape or attempt to shape research and evaluation practices and what implications that focus will have on our work. This event was co-sponsored by the Regional Research Institute at Portland State University, and was very well attended.

This year, we are particularly focused on building our student outreach efforts and increasing both the diversity of our organization and our responsiveness to the evaluation needs of diverse communities. As always, we welcome new volunteers, so please contact us if you would like to share any of your skills or time with us. Thanks to all of you for your participation and interest, and please continue to provide us feedback about the types of opportunities you hope to get through OPEN.

Finally, a bit of positive news: Pamela Clark, OPEN President for 2004, is recovering well and will be returning from her medical leave soon. We look forward to welcoming her back!

Thank you and I look forward to meeting and/or seeing you at our upcoming events!

Juliette Mackin,
President-Elect and Acting President 2004