

University Community Partnerships that Promote Evidence-Based Macro Practice

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ABSTRACT. This article articulates three dimensions of EBP grounded in theory for macro practice: intention toward social change, planning and decision-making, and civic participation. These dimensions are then applied to university community partnerships that are complex community interventions. The goals of these partnerships are to improve the social environment in low-income neighborhoods through community development and reform the university as a social institution from neighborhood bystander to responsible, engaged citizen. Finally, the article introduces the concept of a planning triangle, a framework linking evidence derived from community assessments and practice-relevant research to decisive and timely action in the field.

KEYWORDS. Evidence-based practice, university community partnerships, community development, institutional change, planning and decision-making

Defining the parameters of evidence-based macro practice (EBMP) in social work must incorporate an understanding of the theories for practice that form its foundation and an appreciation of the con-

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textual realities of designing, implementing, and evaluating complex community-based interventions. The clinically oriented definition of evidence-based practice (EBP) offered by Mullen, Shlonsky, Bledsoe, and Bellamy (2005) suggests that EBP is intended to help practitioners enhance the quality of decisions in their areas of practice (care of individual clients), manage constantly evolving research knowledge, incorporate client values and expectations into the practice process and choices, and provide a framework for lifelong learning and education that encourages high-quality practice-relevant research (pp. 61–63).

This is, indeed, a thoughtful framework with several areas of transferability to macro practice. All social workers should strive to identify sources of evidence in their respective domains: to apply theory to practice, to integrate research findings into day-to-day practice decisions, to assess and understand the conditions in the client's/consumer's environment, and to honor client values and expected outcomes. In addition, social workers, irrespective of a micro or macro perspective, need frameworks for lifelong learning that seek out usable knowledge from practice-relevant research.

The purpose of this article is to first introduce some dimensions of macro practice that are related to elements in the definition of evidence-based practice cited in Mullen et al. (2005). These dimensions include (a) the intention toward social change, (b) planning and decision-making, and (c) civic participation—a dimension that encompasses partnerships and community-based research. Theories for macro practice will be presented that support the role of macro practice in the paradigm of EBP. Finally, university community partnerships (UCPs) will be examined in relation to the three dimensions as an example of a community intervention that promotes evidence-based macro practice.

INTENTION TOWARD SOCIAL CHANGE

Theories and Contexts

At the foundation of macro practice is an unwavering commitment to large-scale social change. A number of concepts related to sociological theory and social change helped to develop the field of macro social work practice in the late 1960s and 1970s. In his "Foreword" to Mayer's (1972) book, *Social Planning and Social Change*, Zald (1972) says, "attempts to achieve social values might proceed more effectively by analysis and change of the environmental

or social systems constraints and determinants of a particular problem area rather than by direct interpersonal work with target populations” (p. vii). Zald goes on to say that three major modes are needed to change a system: (a) change the combination of persons who participate in the system, (b) change the roles people play in the system, and (c) change the statuses of the persons in that system (p. vii). This shift in focus away from individual pathology to the social environment as the locus of change and to social institutions as targets of change continues to inform macro social work practice today.

One key aspect of EBP is the integration of client preferences, needs, strengths, and values as part of a contextual assessment of a client’s circumstance (Gambrill, 2006; Mullen et al., 2005). A client’s circumstance is shaped by factors in his or her social, economic, and physical environments. It is the condition of these neighborhood environments—particularly the myriad circumstances associated with living in concentrated poverty—and the development of interventions to change and improve conditions in these environments that have historically been at the center of macro social work practice.

Focusing on the social environment and on social institutions creates challenges as well as opportunities. Persons practicing in community settings, either in public agencies or in nonprofit organizations, have experienced over the past 25 years the impacts of environmental turbulence and organizational change. The influence of recent public policies and environmental forces on communities and organizations has been profound. The implications of devolution, the global economy, immigration and shifting demographics, covert privatization, and regionalism have dramatically altered patterns of local neighborhood resources, of resident need, and of organizational stability at the community, county, and state levels (Carnochan & Austin, 2001; Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Mulroy & Back Tamburo, 2004).

At issue are these fundamental questions: Where is the local community today? How do we define it? To whom are community-based organizations now accountable? What roles and responsibilities do social institutions have for community development and neighborhood improvement? (Mulroy, 2000).

Social workers employed as executive directors, program managers, planners, case managers, organizers, and community developers increasingly participate on community-oriented teams, task forces, coalitions, and large-scale public/private partnerships. Macro social workers work side-by-side with people representing a myriad of professions, interests, and backgrounds. These community workers are

typically members of several partnerships and coalitions at the same time (Mulroy & Shay, 1998). In many instances they helped to form the partnerships. Executive directors of nonprofit organizations are perceived by leaders in the public and for-profit sectors as neutral facilitators, and as such are increasingly called upon to lead public/private partnerships (Kanter, 2000).

This inter-organizational environment is characterized by high complexity and by the politics of social administration. In addition, community-based social welfare organizations are fraught with what Gummer (1990) calls the “messy” environment created by the politics of social administration brought in on the tide of New Federalism. Its features include scarce resources, conflicting goals, uncertain technologies, multiple centers of power, and irreverent attitudes toward authority (p. 17). A macro practitioner’s ability to reach intended program outcomes and organizational missions in this turbulent environment is enhanced when the practitioner has well-honed critical thinking skills and can link evidence derived from assessment and practice-relevant research to decisive action in the field.

FRAMING THE QUESTION

These contexts and conditions pose challenges in the conversion of information needed for individual practitioner decisions into an answerable question, a central aspect of EBP. First, key policy decisions or implementation strategies concerning a community intervention are rarely made by one practitioner acting alone. They are discussed and decided upon by members of multi-disciplinary, interorganizational, and usually multi-sector teams. Such deliberations are most successful when they proceed at the pace set by the community (Mattesich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001; Mulroy, 1997). These constraints do not preclude individual social workers from engaging in EBP relative to their own roles and responsibilities as team members.

The relationship between theory and practice and between research and practice in the community context has been a long-standing concern among scholars in urban planning as well. deNeufville (1981, 1986), for example, found that urban planning practitioners subscribe to the rhetoric that information and analysis are important in planning, although few actually use data in any significant way in practice.

Finally, community change initiatives are considered fundable by philanthropies and government agencies only if the question comes

from the community and can be disseminated back to them (Holland, 2005). This emphasis on accountability to community organizations and neighborhood residents provides a clear directive from major funders to change the combination of persons participating in the change initiative.

PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

Enhancing the quality of decision-making for social work practitioners is a central element of EBP. A stream of scholarship relevant to this dimension is the now-classic literature on community theory, research, and action that formed the bedrock of community organization and social planning as a field of social work (Checkoway, 1986; Gilbert & Specht, 1977; Perlman & Gurin, 1972; Rothman, 1968; Warren, 1978). Starting in the 1960s, there was intense interest in planning as a process of solving social problems and policy development. Recent scholarship has attempted to build on and extend the original work by examining the linkages among theory, research, and practice to contemporary conditions (see, for example, Checkoway, 1997, 2002; Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Gummer, 1990; Ife, 1996; Mulroy, 2004a; Mulroy & Austin, 2004; Rothman, 1996; Weil, 2005).

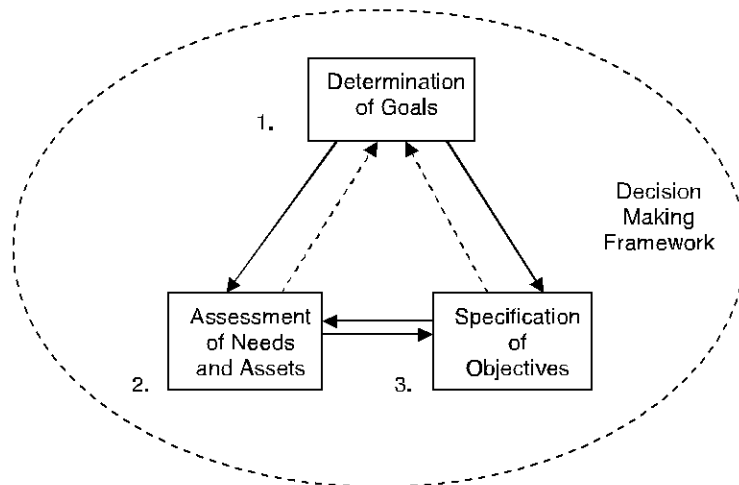
One approach to planning and decision-making of interest to evidence-based macro practice is the scholarship of Mayer (1985) in his work toward conceptualizing a theory of developmental planning. He identified nine stages within a rational planning model: (1) determination of goals, (2) assessment of needs, (3) specification of objectives, (4) design of alternative actions, (5) estimation of the consequences of each action, (6) selection of a course of action, (7) implementation, (8) evaluation, and (9) feedback. These stages in the planning and decision-making process do not occur in a linear fashion.

Organization theory for management practice also considers planning and decision-making one of the core functions of management to insure efficient and effective internal agency operations (Shafritz & Ott, 2001). Derived from planning theory and the decision sciences, this material is currently taught in advanced macro practice courses such as social administration, human services management, and program management (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin, 1999; Lewis, Packard, & Lewis, 2006; Patti, 2001). Knowledge and skills required to conduct community needs and assets assessments are taught in social planning courses, community organization courses, and applied in advanced macro practice field education curriculum.

THE PLANNING TRIANGLE AND EVIDENCE

In the search for a systematic way for practitioners to seek out and use evidence, I propose that Mayer's (1985) developmental planning model be adapted to isolate the importance of a planning triangle—the iterative relationship among stages 1, 2, and 3 in Mayer's model, as depicted in Figure 1. Utilization of the planning triangle provides a means to identify and critically appraise practice-relevant research and then systematically integrate it into making practice decisions. For example, stage 1, the determination of goals, refers to the selection of a broad, long-range purpose for a policy or program. Stage 2, the assessment of needs, refers to fact-finding procedures that include community-based research, formal community needs assessments, surveys, or other means to determine the extent of some undesirable social condition or unmet need. In addition to reviewing and conducting needs assessments as Mayer suggests, current practices also include an asset-based approach to identifying community resources and strengths (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Stage 3, specification of objectives, refers to selection of outcome objectives to operationalize the goal. Objectives must meet the criteria of being clear, specific, measurable, time-limited, realistic, and represent a commitment (Kettner et al., 1999).

FIGURE 1. The Planning Triangle for Evidence-Based Practice.



The implications for evidence-based macro practice (EBMP) are these:

- A practitioner is not able to determine the amount of community change to be sought, which is the essence of an objective, until he or she knows the extent of the condition involved and the resources available, which is the function of the assessment of needs and assets.
- A community needs assessment includes the analysis of existing research and completion of new research as indicated (Tropman, 1995).
- It is necessary to complete all the steps in the “planning triangle” before deciding what intervention is most appropriate—as indicated by the evidence.
- The planning triangle can serve as a framework for education and lifelong learning by encouraging critical thinking and using practice-relevant research.

Civic Participation

Civic participation, often called citizen participation in the macro social work literature, has historic roots as a major method of change to open up community decision-making to citizen involvement. Studies over time have also concluded that, as important as citizen participation is in the community building movement, it can be difficult to implement in local settings (Arnstein, 1969; Burke, 1978; Colby, 1997). One reason is the historical background of centralized planning and decision-making in most cities. Another is the long-held assumption that such decisions require professional expertise that only trained planners, business and professional elites, public administrators, or university faculty may possess (Burke, 1978). Research on community interventions and power has identified a number of different models of citizen participation that have resulted in community empowerment, organizational change, and community development at local, national, and international levels (for example, see Aabatena, 1997; Cohen & Austin, 1997; Colby, 1997; Hardina, 1997).

Arnstein (1969) introduced the framework of a “ladder of citizen participation” that became the foundation for understanding the roles of people and of community-based organizations (CBOs) in public participation. It identifies eight “rungs” on a ladder of public participation, beginning with the lowest first two rungs that represent

essentially non-participatory roles. Rungs 3 (informing), 4 (consultation), and 5 (placation) represent some increase in participation, but carry only degrees of tokenism in the decision-making process. People and organizations continue to work their way up to rungs 6 (partnership), 7 (delegated power), and 8 (citizen control). These latter rungs represent the highest degrees of citizen power in the public participation decision system (Green & Haines, 2002). This conceptual framework is still used by practitioners today. It can help a social worker assess the following questions:

- To what extent am I involved in community self-help, empowerment, and change?
- Has “professionalism” inadvertently distanced me from my constituent base?
- Might pressure to get scarce external funding streams co-opt me, resulting in mission-drift away from original purposes and community needs?
- To what extent do I represent the “voice” of the disenfranchised in the public decision system and assist them in developing their own voice within the process?

Civic participation is a key principle utilized by social workers in the civic engagement endeavor of university community partnerships. It manifests itself in two specific strategies: the formation of partnerships as an overarching strategy, and partnering with residents and local representatives in community-based research.

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Agents of Social Change

In his original charge, Boyer (1990) challenged higher education to assert a “larger clarity of direction in the nation’s life.” He proposed the transformation of American colleges and universities to look outward to their communities, to renew the civic mission of higher education, and to expand on the learning and discovery mission that has been its foundation. Many believe that it is imperative for higher education to return to a mission in which the advancement of discovery, learning, and the common good is generated by collaborative

partnerships that look to higher education for leadership and clear direction. What are the characteristics of these partnerships? What do they have to do with social work? And how do they relate to evidence-based macro practice?

The University Community Partnership (UCP) is a multi-disciplinary and multi-constituency intervention implemented in local communities across the country for the purpose of effecting community change. Knowledge of UCPs is important to social work scholars and practitioners because the goal is to improve living conditions and opportunities in low-income neighborhoods where many clients reside. The purpose is to alter powerful relationships and influence—specifically the institutional role of universities—through reciprocity and an exchange of knowledge, expertise, and resources with community development corporations, CBOs, and local residents (Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001).

What is Civic Engagement?

UCPs vary in type and in sources of funding, but they work toward a common purpose—to engage a university (or community college, four-year college, stand-alone graduate professional school, or other educational institution) as a partner in community, social, and economic development (Vidal, Nye, Walker, Manjarrez, & Romanik, 2002). The historical record documents that institutions of higher education have typically walled themselves off from their neighbors resulting in tense town/gown relations. Many used low-income neighborhoods as labs for student learning or as sites for externally funded research projects that did not ultimately accrue benefits back to an unforgiving local community (Fisher, Fabricant, & Simmons, 2004).

The current imperative is a call for universities to use their intellectual, economic, and human resources to become immersed in their neighborhood setting for the purpose of social change. Colleges and universities are asked to address root causes of social and economic inequalities and barriers to healthy and just societies (Schultz, Israel, Selig, & Bayer, 1998). A strategic goal is to get the university out of its “ivory tower” and into the community in the role of an active, responsible “citizen” (Scheibel, Bowley, & Jones, 2005). These new roles call for community members of the partnership, not university faculty alone, to establish the future agenda and determine which critical research questions should be addressed. In sum, UCPs have diversified the combination of people at the decision table and changed

the roles people play in the system to be of “equal status” rather than hierarchical.

LEADERSHIP AND VALUES

Leadership from campus presidents has had a profound impact on the development and sustainability of UCPs. In 1985, the presidents of Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford Universities formed Campus Compact, an organization of presidents committed to re-focus the role of colleges and universities to address the civic purpose of higher education. Today, university leadership and commitment from its 950-member group are articulated in the organization’s mission statement:

Campus Compact is a national coalition of college and university presidents committed to the civic purposes of higher education. To support this civic mission, Campus Compact promotes community service that develops students’ citizenship skills and values, encourages collaborative partnerships between campuses and communities, and assists faculty who seek to integrate public and community engagement into their teaching and research (Gelmon et al., 2001, p. i).

Campus Compact’s membership includes public, private, two- and four-year institutions across the spectrum of higher education. The goal for these institutions is to put into practice the ideal of civic engagement by sharing knowledge and resources with their communities, creating local development initiatives, and supporting service-learning efforts in areas such as literacy, health care, hunger, homelessness, the environment, and senior services (Zlotkowski, Jones, Lenk, Meeropol, Gelmon, & Norvell, 2005, p. i).

Planning and Decision-Making at the University of Pennsylvania

In an in-depth and far-reaching essay titled “The 21st Century Urban University: New Roles for Practice and Research,” Judith Rodin (2005), past President of the University of Pennsylvania (1994–2004), articulates the planning and decision-making processes with which the university engaged over a 10-year period that resulted in the evolution of major urban initiatives, including heavy investment in neighborhood revitalization and development of the Penn Institute for

Urban Research. The Institute seeks to blend practice and theory in urban-focused research that identifies and examines critical questions for the future.

Articulating her intention toward social change at the beginning of her presidency, Rodin (2005) writes:

... I felt strongly that we had to set an example of integrity for our students. The state of the neighborhood was our business. How could we educate and encourage our students to contribute to society if we did not offer them an institutional example of positive civic engagement? If Penn could make discoveries that saved lives and drove the global economy, then surely we had both the capacity and the moral obligation to use our intellectual might to make things right at our doorstep. (p. 239)

The Planning Triangle in Action

Beginning with an in-depth review of community research, urban, economic, and social theory, and a new study that investigated the social and economic capacity of local community development corporations in West Philadelphia, President Rodin and her team sought out and utilized evidence. From their ongoing analysis, they developed long-term goals and short-term strategic objectives. They adjusted goals and strategies as new data became known about the neighborhoods, about potential resources and constraints, and as new or conflicting theoretical perspectives were introduced. In this planning and decision-making phase, they selected as their conceptual framework Jacobs' (1961) classic book, *Life and Death of Great American Cities*, finding compatibility with her concepts of "eyes on the street" and "organized chaos." By 1996, a geographic area had been targeted for intervention, and a five-pronged strategy called the West Philadelphia Initiatives was planned. It included:

1. Making the neighborhood clean, safe, and attractive with a variety of new interventions.
2. Stimulating the housing market.
3. Encouraging retail development by attracting new shops, restaurants, and cultural venues that were neighborhood friendly.
4. Spurring economic development by directing university contracts and purchases to local business.
5. Improving the public schools.

President Rodin and her team were also able to determine what their constraints were, leading to decisions of what they would not be able to do. Once this planning and decision-making phase was completed, they moved forward to develop and implement the West Philadelphia Initiatives across this large, urban university.

FUNDERS AS MOTIVATORS

Over the past four decades, entities such as the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Aspen Institute, the Ford Foundation, and other philanthropies as well as the federal government added impetus for civic engagement in urban neighborhoods through major funding initiatives that supported empirical work (for example, see Chaskin & Ogletree, 1993; Connell, Kubisch, Schorr, & Weiss, 1995; Ford Foundation, 1964; Marris & Rein, 1973; Warren, Rose, & Bergunder, 1974).

The federally funded Office of University Partnerships within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is a recent example of a grant provision that motivated university civic engagement. Over the past decade, the Office of University Partnerships (OUP) provided grants to approximately 150 colleges and universities representing a wide range of organizational types, urban and rural geographic locations, and community conditions. According to Fisher et al. (2004), HUD reported in 1999 that 342 colleges offered nearly 600 UCP initiatives, more than twice the number HUD reported four years earlier.

One of its major resources, the Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) grant program, requires applicant universities to have a community building curriculum in place. This requirement serves as a motivator for many campuses to direct faculty interest toward community-based research, strengthen the community content in the curriculum, and bring students out of classrooms and into communities as service learners.

MULTI-CONSTITUENCY PARTNERSHIPS AS AN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

A hallmark of UCPs is the emphasis on building opportunities for civic participation and implementing goals through multi-constituency community-based partnerships. Respect and attention must be paid to the values, goals, and desires for civic participation among multiple,

diverse, and typically conflicting constituency groups (or clients)—at the same time. Partnerships are by design multidisciplinary, multi-sector, and multi-leveled. Social work faculty involved in UCPs can expect to participate with (a) faculty from other academic disciplines, departments, or professional schools across their campus or among several campuses; (b) students involved in research, outreach, or service learning; (c) community-based organizations and residents; and (d) other public, private, or nonprofit representatives external to the university who may have an interest in the community development goal. In effect, such partnerships change the statuses of participants from a hierarchical to a participatory relationship.

Three principles for engagement intended to facilitate status-change among these diverse constituent groups have been developed. These include:

- respectful discourse
- mutual learning
- mutually beneficial activities (Campus Compact, 2001).

One example of a mutually beneficial activity is community outreach, also called service learning on many campuses. Through service learning in low-income neighborhoods, university students directly participate in a variety of community-based projects. The goal is to learn community care, social responsibility, and an appreciation for civic engagement that will help to define their values—the values they will take with them into adulthood (Gelmon et al., 2001).

Many dimensions of civic participation in the public interest, in addition to those mentioned above, have generated UCPs not only in the United States but around the globe. Issues such as urban health, community justice (or injustice), disaffection of youth, and environmental degradation have sparked the development of new UCPs; many exist as campus-based centers. Common characteristics include civic engagement through partnerships and a commitment to community-based research. (See, for example, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health; the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; Prevention Research Centers; National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences; and the Kellogg Foundation's Community School Program.)

But partnerships also involve challenges and risks. An empirical study of 25 COPC grantees conducted by the Urban Institute identified key findings in three areas: community engagement, partnerships, and institutionalization (Vidal et al., 2002). The study found that

successful partnership performance depends on the organizational capacity of the partners—their ability to actually deliver capably on their commitments to one another, including their ability to bring necessary resources to the table, and their ability to negotiate and problem solve together. The extent of institutionalization of COPC projects was facilitated by executive leadership, budget, publicity, faculty involvement, and external fundraising. Factors that hindered institutionalization were found to be related to the organization's mission, hiring, promotion, and tenure policies, levels of community involvement, and policy constraints. “Most notably, very few schools have altered fundamentally the promotion and tenure guidelines to reward faculty for community outreach. These factors seem to be widespread impediments to further institutionalization of outreach” (p. vii).

Community Based Research: Seeking Usable Knowledge

Alternately called applied research, engaged research, public scholarship, or community-based research, the common focus of these research activities is to support faculty collaboration with community practitioners and residents in applying and disseminating knowledge with the ultimate goal of community improvement (Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 2006; Vidal et al., 2002). A goal is the transferability of applicable research skills to local residents and community leaders so that findings can be used to self-advocate in the community decision system. While it can have many purposes and forms, community-based research is generally conducted in a neighborhood in a participatory way guided by local values, vision, and needs.

In a study of three quite different participatory research projects—one in India, another in rural Appalachia, and a third in an upper middle-income residential community of an urban American city—Brown (1986) found that participatory research became the first stage of a two-stage community planning process. In the first stage, disparate groups identified problems, analyzed underlying causes, and formulated plans to influence decisions. Participatory research increased the number and diversity of groups participating in formal community planning and thus made conflict more likely. Management of diversity was required at each stage of the community planning process. In the end, diverse problem definitions were integrated into a commonly shared definition that facilitated focused analysis (pp. 132–133).

“On the Ground” in East Baltimore

An example of a community participatory research effort is drawn from the University of Maryland UCP in East Baltimore. The Fannie Mae Foundation funded a UCP to coordinate the use of university resources to better serve the affordable housing and community development needs of low-income residents in Baltimore neighborhoods. One administrative stipulation was that several academic departments (including the School of Social Work) and their self-selected faculty on two campuses were expected to collaborate to achieve the project's goals.

Using civic participation principles (Arnstein, 1969), the involved faculty asked community leaders and residents in an Eastside neighborhood what their most pressing problems/concerns were and what assistance they wanted from the university. In effect, the community was invited to set the agenda. Not surprisingly, several constituencies emerged with different needs and requests, supporting Brown's (1986) findings. Four CBOs requested help in developing individual agency strategic plans. They were clear that they first wanted to increase their own organization's capacity and later come together as a strong collaboration to address a longer-term goal of creating a strategic plan for the whole Eastside neighborhood. Second, some active residents asked for help in developing their own Homeowners Improvement Association, a project that involved the development of household surveys and focus groups. A third constituency of small business owners and residents wanted to acquire technical skills in conducting a building condition and land use survey of more than 1000 parcels and to have the results mapped in Geospatial Information Systems (GIS). Their goal was to develop the knowledge and skills that would strengthen their ability to become more active and more influential when engaging in discussions with City Hall decision makers in an ongoing neighborhood revitalization effort.

Faculty from the different professional schools and their student interns assumed responsibility for each of these community-based research projects. Students and faculty worked separately and together (including during the summer) in an as-needed division of labor in completing the project tasks.

The outcomes from this phase of civic engagement assisted a range of constituencies in the neighborhoods to advance their respective community improvement efforts with new knowledge, technology, and skills as the funder required, and on the terms the community requested. However, the outcome to institutionalize the campus-based

faculty partnership was not realized, supporting Vidal et al.'s (2002) findings. Throughout the grant's final year, a continuous community presence through community-based research was very labor intensive for faculty. Yet it represented only a small fraction of their total academic workload.

The commitment to the community and relationship with local leaders was sustained. All faculty and most students in the East Baltimore project continue to be involved in the Eastside neighborhood and invest their time and talents there with the original CBOs. Faculty engagement, however, is now individualistic and entrepreneurial rather than representing a coordinated institutional relationship between the university and the Eastside's organizations and constituencies. (See Mulroy, 2004b, for further discussion of study results.)

CONCLUSION

Three dimensions of evidence-based practice are specifically useful to macro practice: intention toward social change, planning and decision making, and civic participation that includes partnership formation and community-based research. These dimensions can be applied to university community partnerships, a complex community intervention guided by social values and intended to (a) alter the social environment in low-income neighborhoods by generating community development; and (b) reform the university as a social institution from the role of neighborhood bystander to that of responsible, engaged citizen.

There is a growing body of evidence that community university partnerships have been created, implemented, and sustained. Intended outcomes are being achieved, and organizational units involved in the partnerships are being changed (Gelmon et al., 2001; Holland, 2005; Rodin, 2005; Silka, 2005; Vidal et al., 2002). However, there are some caveats. Evidence also suggests that complex, multi-constituency community interventions such as UCPs may be difficult to implement and institutionalize (Holland, 2005; Vidal et al., 2002). Specifically, to sustain an ongoing UCP infrastructure, top university leaders need to carefully monitor and evaluate not only outcomes and impacts but also *feasibility*. Ongoing participation by faculty will require a redesign of faculty workload to factor in the extenuating and time-consuming commitments related to developing community-based courses, internships, and research projects. Moreover, motivation at the faculty level will require the redesign of tenure and promotion criteria to value

the scholarly impact of community-based research in directing public policy initiatives and goals toward social and economic justice.

Practitioners at the community level want to know what the potential benefits and costs are of being a community “partner” in a time of scarce resources and environmental turbulence at their own agencies. Once involved, they want to know how to proceed. Who, in all this complexity, is the client? What decision rules should be formulated to guide practice in multi-disciplinary and multi-constituency, inter-organizational partnerships?

These new directions pose opportunities and challenges. The use of evidence-based practice marks a clear direction for advancing critical thinking and sound decision-making as the profession moves forward in shifting its practice paradigm. The *planning triangle* offers one framework for scholars and practitioners to use in this decision-making process. The efforts at the University of Pennsylvania highlight the use of critical thinking in university community partnerships. The search for evidence needs to extend well beyond the scope of one discipline or profession and beyond familiar theories of change. Practitioners using the paradigm of evidence-based practice will seek guidance from scholarship in allied professions, such as health and public health, where the evidence-based debate and use of community-based research methods have a longer published timeline (Schultz et al., 1998). They will also search out competing theories of change from economics and political science, as well as sociology that influences our understanding of the conditions in the social environment and in social institutions.

These are genuine challenges for social work educators and other practitioners. As organizations move to adopt the paradigm of evidence-based practice, researchers will have to learn how to present empirical studies to the practice community in an accessible, usable way, such as reporting the evidence in online journals to which organizations readily subscribe. These actions will help to promote the integration of research evidence with practice expertise while considering the values of consumers receiving services from our community-based organizations.

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