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Book Review

Roberts-DeGennaro, M., & Fogel, S. J. (Eds.). (2011). *Using Evidence to Inform Practice for Community and Organizational Change.* **Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books. ISBN: 978-1-933478-25-8, 244 pp.**

As Sondra J. Fogel and Maria Roberts-DeGennaro make clear in their introduction to *Using Evidence to Inform Practice for Community and Organizational Change,* evidence-based practice (EBP) has its roots in the medical profession and has been adopted by social work in clinical practice. They claim it is only more recently that macro practice in social work involving administration, organizations, and community has adopted what they call evidence-informed practice (EIP), which is consistent with social work's long tradition of community-based research. The authors prefer the term EIP because it is consistent with social work macro practice in "translat[ing] findings into action steps that consider the uniqueness of the setting and consumer in that context" (p. xxi). An understanding of the distinction between EBP and EIP is essential to understanding the chapters appearing in this volume.

In the first chapter, Roberts-DeGennaro provides an overview of the factors that inform macro practice and constitute EIP. These factors include considering client characteristics, culture and preferences, using practice expertise to guide decision-making processes, and using practice-relevant research-based sources of information. She provides a provocative list from the American Psychological Association, which challenges the implementation of evidence-based practices. These challenges include the preparation of agencies to accept the model, the fidelity of the model, and "problems of using data collected within real-world service systems" (p. 11). Another list of essential criteria comes from John Poertner's chapter that features the four levels of best evidence. The authors of other chapters make it clear that, in general, macro studies have not met the level one standard of being an effective intervention replicated in at least "two randomized clinical trials" (p. 16). This lack of meeting level one standards distinguishes EIP from EBP clinical studies, which comparatively strive to meet this goal.

This book helps the reader understand that evidence-informed practice challenges the researcher to function in multiple disciplines—community organization, child welfare, and mental health—to name a few. Researchers in these macro settings often serve as change agents. Therefore, almost all

of the case examples tell a story of struggle. There are no clear-cut results; nothing is easy; there are too many variables, and the results are not easily generalized. Important questions are raised, however, and the goals of researchers and their projects clarify ways for programs to become more effective.

As social work research, most of these studies are consumer focused; they make an effort to improve the lives of the persons being served. Most have a very clear social justice component. For instance, the chapter by Netting, Borders, Nelson, and Huber on a long term-care ombudsman program shows that although progress is being made, gaps exist and states are still not reporting data. The first effort at a national system has resulted in greater transparency and utilization by personnel who not only contribute to the system, but also obtain feedback that informs their practice. Padgett, Stanhope, and Henwood's chapter on Housing-First services for homeless adults with co-occurring disorders contrasts EIP with standard care models, which require adherence to psychiatric and substance abuse treatment. Housing-First houses clients regardless of their substance use. Each chapter has an implication or practice guideline section at the end. This chapter includes both, with cost rationales such as reduced institutional stays in either hospitals or prisons for those receiving housing. On a social justice basis, the authors claim this type of program "transforms the role of the social workers from enforcers to empowering collaborators" (p. 94).

The strongest feature of this book is that it provides a number of examples of the dissemination and implementation of research based interventions in community, such efforts to engage congregations in community organizing, and in governmental agencies that train child welfare staff and measure not only knowledge attainment, but also its effects on the outcomes of agency practice. Another chapter provides those new to evaluation practice with very clear instructions on how to carry out an evidence-informed literature search to find interventions that address the problem of school dropouts, and cultural issues in the setting.

Although there are many gems in this book, the absence of a comprehensive glossary or resource index makes it difficult to find definitions of terms or Web links to EBP and EIP resources and organizations, and other seminal materials alluded to in the chapters. It would have been helpful if the book listed some of the multiple sources that provide impetus to improving service delivery such as the Government Performance and Results Act, [Public Law 103-62], quality assurance methods, the Institute of Medicine, the Society for Social Work and Research and so on. Another shortcoming is that the book is divided into two sections, the first containing methods and the second examples from the field. There is, however, overlap: The chapters in the first section also provide examples, and the chapters in the second section utilize specific research methods. It would be helpful to conceptualize the book's sections based on either the type of setting

or the methods used, from foundational chapters to ones in which full-scale research studies are described. Organizing the book as such would help readers use it as an excellent reference to various levels and types of evidence-informed practice.

EIP is presented in this book as a recent development. Although the term is new, there are many historical precedents in research regarding community and agency systems conducted by social work and present in fields and academic disciplines with which social work is allied, including public health, sociology, economics, education, community psychology and medicine among many others. Those who read this book will appreciate the ability of social workers to draw from these sources, as well as evidence from the body of social work knowledge. However, a longer historical lens is lacking. The book does not help the reader remember, for instance, that social work, during its origins at Hull-House, based much of its success politically, morally and practically on scientific surveys and studies of the impoverished neighborhoods. Alice Hamilton and early Hull-House volunteers directed their attention to investigating such mundane features as family income, school truancy, sanitation, tuberculosis, cocaine distribution, infant mortality, and many other issues affecting the health and safety of the community and its residents at that time (Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, n.d.; Schultz, 2005). These early efforts at fact-finding would place these current evidence-informed efforts in perspective. In the context of this tradition, *Using Evidence to Inform Practice for Community and Organizational Change* will help social workers appreciate the importance of using research and fact-finding to be more responsive to the needs of the people and communities they serve. After reading this book, social work students, administrators, supervisors, and researchers, as well as direct service providers involved in program development and evaluation, will recognize practice skills and tools they already use, such as outcome measurements and best practices. It will help them see how the programs in which they are involved can become the subject of research to inform practice.

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