



## Revisiting the Past to Reinvent the Future

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## FROM THE EDITORS

### Revisiting the Past to Reinvent the Future

In preparing this issue of the *Journal of Community Practice*, one of Yogi Berra's sayings—"It's like déjà-vu all over again"—seems oddly fitting. We tend to revisit issues and rediscover what was old like it is new once more. Whether 2015 is "déjà-vu all over again" time will tell, but with the looming Presidential race in 2016 unfolding this year with a Bush v. Clinton face-off a real possibility, one starts to wonder. On the macro and community practice front, this tingling "maybe we've been here before" seems all too timely. Several articles in this issue and the upcoming *JCP* special issue examining policies and programs in the wake of 50 years of the War on Poverty make one begin to wonder how long certain issues will stay with us.

Conservative and regressive times tend to be catalysts for more progressive periods that, again, give way to more conservative times, only to be replaced by a resurgence of progressivism as we slowly inch forward on the slow-rising tide of social and economic justice. Today, we continue to press for a renewal of macro practice in social work education and practice, courtesy of a Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice. Thus far, the efforts of this group have been important to recognizing and renewing the importance for community, organization, and social action work that supports management and leadership of the human and community service field, as well as in the policy arena that shapes our field of practice. This socio-economic and political arena remains a cauldron bubbling with disparate and divisive voices yielding too few elixirs to address the ills of poverty, inequality, racial disparities, and a waning sense of political engagement. And it leaves questions begging to be asked, including many we have asked before.

Does social work serve to *regulate the poor* (Piven & Cloward, 1972) and the oppressed, or does it embrace the importance of empowerment, participation, and advocacy in working with those who are not fully and equally participating in our economy and society? Has social work abandoned its mission (Specht & Courtney, 1994)? Can social work be both the "fence and the ambulance" for those at risk of the precipice (Milan, 1895/1936, p. 273–274)? These questions and tensions continue within social work and merit our ongoing reflection and debate.

Sadly, those not fully participating in this economy now include a very large segment of the middle and working classes, a factor looming very large

on the political horizon. Although we are beginning to emerge from a deep worldwide Great Recession—although many countries would argue that it has been more like another Great Depression—the early voices in protest from the Occupy Movement or the many other democratic peoples' movements, such as the Arab Spring and other social uprisings, have quieted, but they are still percolating. Is the growing resurgence of the labor movement and efforts to grow the minimum wage and advance a living wage, particularly among the working poor, one more step in this forward march? Will we see the rise of another progressive era in response to this current conservative, neoliberal, and austere mood that has engulfed America and much of the world in recent decades?

Our own modest initiatives to reinvigorate macro practice are a small start for reawakening the social work ethos and profession that first emerged in the Progressive Era and then blossomed in the progressive social change of the 1960s, but we are somewhat late to the current game of social movement and so the sense of *déjà-vu* is to be expected. Recent efforts of the Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice have sought to ensure that the new Council on Social Work Education's Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS 2015) reflect a broader sense of both those we serve—*clients and constituencies*—and with whom we practice—*individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations, and the policy arena*. Hopefully, the new Department of Labor definition of social work will also include reference to community practice and human service management and leadership, which have been conspicuously missing among all the case and clinical terminology of social work. Also recently, a new initiative with impetus from the New York Community Trust is engaged seasoned educators and practitioners to focus on enhancing policy and political work in social work beyond macro practice, where policy and political work is usually an emphasis, to general and clinical social work education and practice.

Although the *Journal of Community Practice* has had its roots in the social work field, the issues we are revisiting today have broad reach into many disciplines concerned with community, organization, and social policy action, and the challenges for social and economic justice are more and more visible in other allied fields and professions from sociology to community psychology to urban and public affairs, public health, and many others. We are hopeful this and future issues of our journal will continue to catalyze thinking across disciplines and fields who share a reawakened sense of urgency in community practice.

In this issue, the authors challenge us to think about our roles in urban development in the past—whether we were part of the regulation or the social justice—and whether we are clear about our roles in today's urban redevelopment efforts. They ask us to look at human and social capital and how strong democratic models promote greater trust and acceptance in diverse communities. We are encouraged to examine lessons learned

from the difficulties of engaging citizens around community substance abuse issues and the importance of understanding and appreciating our community partners as we engage students in community-based service learning. They show us the promise of using technology, not only to engage and empower homeless youth, but also social work faculty and researchers in support of labor organizing. We are reminded of how even modest savings incentives can provide empowerment and a positive sense of wealth-building and a stake in the future. Finally, we are asked to revisit early social work research and call for a living wage that resonates with today's concerns with poverty and a living wage for working people. We thank our authors for these following contributions to the *Journal of Community Practice*.

Although social work has a long history of involvement in urban development policy, dating to the settlement house movement, Bowen explores a neglected part of this history by analyzing the role of social work in urban renewal programs. In "Community Practice in the Bulldozer's Shadow: The History and Legacy of Social Work in Urban Renewal," the author examines the functions of social work in urban renewal, which included relocating families dislocated by slum cleaning, as well as community organizers fostering resident input in community development planning. Bowen juxtaposes and reflects on the lasting tension in social work practice between social justice and social control, and the author addresses implications for current social work practice as the profession seeks to take part in new urban redevelopment policies and programs. In examining this history and legacy, the author recognizes that social work shifted from advocacy roles in which practitioners were in solidarity with marginalized communities to a mostly individualized casework practice stance, much as the profession finds itself today struggling to reassert its legacy of macro practice and advocacy in support of social justice.

In asking "Who is Our Neighbor? Toward a Multilevel and Cross-National Roadmap for Building Community Capacity," Parks acknowledges that acceptance of diversity in neighborhood contexts has far-reaching implications across the developed and developing world. It also impacts directly on social justice. The author underscores that practitioners often work in diverse communities and build community capacity in such settings. Through a multilevel analysis, this project quantitatively examines diverse neighbor acceptance across and within 70 nations using the World Values Survey. Study findings suggest that diverse neighborhood acceptance is driven by factors of individual-level human capital and democratic institutions at the national level. The ability to accept diverse neighbors is a vital part of the social capital and community capacity essential to community practice across a range of health and environmental issues, as well as in promoting social justice. Parks goes a long way in providing a roadmap to document the individual and national characteristics that show that diverse neighbor acceptance can offer an international backdrop for both community practitioners and scholars.

In “Educational and Financial Institutions Partnering to Implement CSAs: Evaluation of Financial Partners’ Perspectives from the 2011 GEAR UP Invitational Priority,” Friedline and her colleagues, Scanlon, Johnson, and Elliott, stress that although educational and financial institutions are increasingly partnering to open Children’s Savings Accounts (CSAs), little is known about these partnerships’ effectiveness for planning and implementing CSAs. By examining a 2011 invitational priority from the Department of Education that encouraged partnerships between GEAR UP programs and financial institutions to open CSAs for low-income students, the authors had the opportunity to evaluate these partnerships. Through in-depth interviews with 10 personnel from six financial institutions who partnered with four GEAR UP programs, the authors were able to see that partnerships with stakeholders, time spent on planning, and strategies for overcoming barriers were critical in establishing CSAs. The authors go on to discuss lessons for practice and policy for CSAs as a mechanism for improving academic performance, as well as preparedness for enrollment into and graduation from institutions of higher education. They underscore that CSAs may help low-income students achieve the academic and economic outcomes commonly enjoyed by their high-income, more advantaged peers and offer them opportunities for economic mobility. In this first attempt at evaluating any partnerships that are implementing CSAs, the lessons learned may be transferrable to partnerships that are implementing CSAs in other program contexts. Last, interviews with students opening accounts underscored the perceived importance of educating them about the broader context of saving.

In “Empowering Homeless Youth: Building Capacity through the Development of Mobile Technology,” Buccieri and Molleson detail a youth-centered participatory action study in which 12 homeless youth designed and developed a mobile application for other homeless youth. Recognizing that information-communication technologies are popular among young people, the authors frame their analysis with a theory of critical youth empowerment and discuss the steps to develop the application, which also allowed these young people to express their opinions and frustrations as it provided an opportunity for them to make the lives of their peers better through improved access to supports and services. Their study demonstrates that information-communication technologies can be an important source of empowerment for young people, as well as a means of monitoring and altering their own health-related behaviors and attitudes. These researchers have sought to involve young people in the creation and implementation of this SAY app technology, and it provided a youth-centered participatory action research experience that was important for capturing the ideas of young people whose voices are often marginalized and affording them an outlet for youth-led advocacy.

Our first *From the Field* article, Brady, Young, and McLeod’s “Utilizing Digital Advocacy in Community Organizing: Lessons Learned from

Organizing in Virtual Spaces to Promote Worker Rights and Economic Justice,” discusses the usefulness and challenges of using social media technologies in community organizing practice, which is often referred to as digital advocacy. The authors base their analysis of digital advocacy in the context of the recent organizing effort undertaken by social work academics, grassroots organizers, and other allies in supporting the hotel workers and labor unions boycott of Hyatt Hotels in San Antonio, Texas, related to the Society for Social Work Research 2014 conference. This digital advocacy effort led to the relocation of conference events from the Grand Hyatt, San Antonio Hotel and toward better conference planning procedures to avoid such worker/union boycotts in the future. The authors contend that the participatory nature of today’s digital experience holds great potential as a virtual organizing tool for social workers and the communities they serve.

In our second *From the Field* article, “Making Service-Learning Partnerships Work: Listening and Responding to Community Partners,” Cronley, Madden, and Davis explore community partners’ perspectives regarding the motivations and barriers to engaging in service-learning partnerships. Drawing on the feedback from three focus groups held with representatives from diverse nonprofit organizations recruited from a university-based center for community service learning, these community partners viewed expanded organizational capacity as the strongest motivator for participation in service learning projects. However, the authors also found that the joy of mentoring students and the ability to acquire new knowledge were additional motivations beyond organizational capacity building. Surprisingly, community partners saw faculty engagement as presenting the greatest barrier, and the authors question whether the power dynamics of service learning and faculty respect for the community in these relationships are of concern.

Our archives editor, Paul H. Stuart, offers a bit of déjà vu from our social work legacy, reflecting and presenting another important paper by Harry L. Lurie: “Economic Stabilization of the Family: The Standard of Living” that Lurie delivered to the National Conference of Social Work in the 1920s. Lurie calls for an adequate family income was based on contemporary research that showed the plight of the working poor to be much greater than was often officially recognized as the standard of income of the day, Lurie’s call for a livable wage for working families certainly resonates with today assessment of the working poor and growing calls, not only for raising the minimum wage, but for establishing a living wage. This archive contribution helps foreshadow our upcoming *JCP* special issue that developed from 2014’s celebration of the 50th anniversary of the War of Poverty, and begs the questions “Who is winning that war?”

As we wind down our book reviews in the *Journal of Community Practice*, we are grateful for the review queue our recent book review editors, Alice Johnson Butterfield and Dorothy “Dee” Gamble, provided for this

volume as they stepped away. Our editorial board and editors are now considering how we want to address book reviews going forward in the journal. We present a number of these outstanding book reviews.

In *Vulnerable Children: Global Challenges in Education, Health, Well-Being and Child Rights*, the editors, Johnson, Agbényiga, and Hitchcock, selected compelling experiences that underscore certain minimal things to which children must have access in order to reach their adult potential, and their selected authors then examine some violations of these conventions through a range of cultural lens. Mapp lauds the uniqueness of the information provided and the strengths-based view that each culture brings. The reviewer notes that their challenges receive scant attention in the peer-reviewed literature and appreciates the clear focus on culture as strength rather than as deficit, which stands in strong contrast to much of the scholarship previously published on these topics.

Mortell and Hansen-Turton's book, *Making Strategy Count in the Health and Human Services Sector*, recognize the support of the Kresge Foundation and the skills of selected members of the Alliance for Children and Families on the *Strategy Counts* initiative that sought to enhance strategy across the nonprofit sector in an attempt to begin to answer vital, survival-based questions among twenty nonprofit agencies. Each agency created "transformational" projects and the book represents the reports from those strategic experiences. As impressive as the outcomes were, Goldberg wonders how replicable results would be for smaller organizations given the much larger size of the agencies involved and whether smaller organizations would more often be concerned with more basic survival questions:

Rosen extols *Restoring Power to Parents and Places* as advancing a model of community development with the family as the primary building block and a unique approach called *family-generated community building*. The reviewer appreciates how the author portrays the workings of modern families, especially in their interrelationships with communities. Rosen sees the book as offering clear steps for strengthening family relationships and, most importantly, their relationships with the communities in which they live.

Midgley finds *Social Enterprise: Accountability and Evaluation Around the World* a useful edited volume especially for its focus on social enterprise from evaluation and accountability and for offering a number of case studies with an international emphasis—although largely case studies of nonprofits that create employment for vulnerable groups. Midgley notes the editors make clear how commercial firms and investors have an increase presence in the field with both nonprofit and commercial providers operating in an increasingly commercialized marketplace that pervades social services and the social welfare discourse. Midgley does lament that lack of any in-depth discussion relative to this field of social enterprise on the pervasive influences of neoliberalism on both the nonprofit and government sectors relative to welfare programs and social life in general.

We are grateful for all the contributions for this issue, and we also thank our reviewers who have taken the time to review multiple versions of authors' articles and, in some cases, even provided further assistance to the authors to develop the best work possible for our Journal. Our thanks to our reviewers: Ben Anderson-Nathe, Carenlee Barkdull, Elizabeth Beck, Julie Birkenmaier, Fred Brooks, Judith Dunlop, Sondra Fogel, Richard Hoefler, Joel Durham Izlar, Thomas Chalmers McLaughlin, John McNutt, Michael Reisch, Robert Silverman, Louise Simmons, Richard Smith, Alma Trinidad, and Amy Blank Wilson. We couldn't have done it without you.

Although we are oddly disturbed by that prescience of having been somewhere before, Yogi Berra also remarked, "The future ain't what it used to be." We hope the contributions in this issue offer alternative visions of the future we'd like it to see, while realistically acknowledging that we may well have been here before.

*Tracy M. Soska, Lorraine Gutiérrez, and Anna M. Santiago, Editors*

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