Some Lessons on Community Organization and Change*

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Community Organization is the process of people coming together to address issues that matter to them. The goals of improving understanding of Community Organization—and its practice—have been embraced by a variety of related disciplines including *political science* (e.g., Cuoto, 1990; Gaventa, 1980), *action anthropology* (Stull and Schensul, 1987; Tax, 1952), *public health* (e.g., Bracht, 1990; Fawcett,

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Paine-Andrews, Francisco, Schultz, et al., 1995; World Health Organization, 1986), *community psychology* (e.g., Fawcett, 1991; Rappaport, Swift, and Hess, 1984), *history* (e.g., Fisher, 1987), *sociology* (e.g., Zald, 1987), and *social welfare* (e.g., Brager and Specht, 1973; Cox, Erlich, Rothman and Tropman, 1987; Dunham, 1963; Perlman and Gurin, 1972; Ross, 1955). In the field of social welfare, in particular, there was an influx of young professionals following World War II who specialized in working within and between groups of people. These and other community organization practitioners attempt to enhance self-determination (a process goal) and improve community life (produce tangible outcomes).

In the United States, the latter half of the twentieth century was a period of marked change in the context of community organization practice. The late 1950s saw a mass migration of low-income families, especially African Americans, from the South to northern cities. This contributed to a political instability in which the Democratic party attempted to attract new urban black voters (Piven and Cloward, 1977). Following mass disruption and protests of the 1960s, there was an unprecedented flurry of federal legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and a flood of antipoverty programs such as food stamps and legal assistance for the poor. Increased racial tensions, and a rollback of government supports for poor people in the 1980s and 1990s, further defined the evolving context of community organization practice.

Community Organization occurs in the variety of contexts that define "community." First, people come together who share a common geographic *place* such as a neighborhood, city, or town. Problem solving through community-based organizations (CBOs), neighborhood associations, and tenants' organizations represent common forms of place-based practice. Second, community organizing occurs among those who share a *work situation* or workplace. For instance, union organizing, such as among industrial or farm laborers, brings together those concerned about working conditions, job security, wages, and benefits. Finally, community organization arises among those who share a common *experience or concern*. For example, organizing occurs among people who are poor (Piven and Cloward, 1977), have concerns about issues such as substance abuse or violence (Fawcett et al., 1995), share a common ethnicity (Branch, 1988; Morris, 1984), or have physical disabilities (Suarez de Balcazar, Bradford, and Fawcett, 1988).

Societal critics sometimes debate whether community organization should feature collaboration *or* confrontation—a false dichotomy that ignores the context of the work. Several models of practice emerged in the various contexts of community organization work (Rothman, 1995). First, *social planning* uses information and analysis to address substantive community issues such as substance abuse or crime. For example, planning

councils or task forces engage professionals in setting goals and objectives, coordinating efforts, and reviewing goal attainment. Although social planning may occur in a context of either consensus or conflict, its use may help build agreement on common ends. Illustratively, information about high rates of adolescent pregnancy, and factors that contribute to it, may help communities focus on the goal of preventing teen pregnancy, and even on controversial means, such as using sexuality education and enhanced access to contraceptives.

Second, *social action* involves efforts to increase power and resources of low-income or marginalized people (Alinsky, 1969). For example, an advocacy organization, such as a disability rights or tobacco control advocacy group, may arrange disruptive events—including lawsuits, sit-ins, or boycotts. These aversive events can be avoided or escaped by accommodations from those in power, such as employers modifying policies that discriminate against people with disabilities or tobacco companies eliminating advertising directed to minors. Social action tactics fit a context of conflicting interests (and discrepancies in power) that are not easily reconciled by conventional means of negotiation.

Third, *locality development* involves bringing people together to discuss common concerns and engage in collaborative problem solving. For example, people in urban neighborhoods or rural communities may cooperate in defining local issues, such as access to job opportunities or reduced violence, and in taking actions to address them. This strategy of group problem solving fits a context of consensus about goals and means.

Finally, there are also a variety of hybrid models that combine elements of the above approaches. For example, *community partnerships* or coalitions combine elements of social planning and locality development when people who share common concerns, such as child well-being or substance abuse, come together to change community conditions—specific programs, policies, and practices—that protect against or reduce risk for these concerns (Fawcett, Paine, Francisco, and Vliet, 1993; Fawcett et al., 1995). These models, and their variations, may be implemented at local, state, regional, and even broader levels.

This chapter reflects on the work of community organization and change in the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century. First, a brief description of the author's background and experience might help clarify the perspective offered. Second, lessons learned from community work are outlined based largely on the reflections of the authors in this book. Finally, the article concludes with a brief discussion of some issues in the work of community organization and change.

BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION EXPERIENCE

I was born in 1947 in Providence, Rhode Island. As an Irish Catholic, my childhood included stories of discrimination against the Irish and others. My academic career spanned the disciplines of applied behavioral psychology, with an emphasis on changing the environment to affect behavior, and community psychology, with its ecological orientation and values of collaboration and respect for community assets and strengths. In the 1990s my colleagues and I became more active in public health, particularly with a network of community health researchers, practitioners, and grant makers involved in community initiatives for health and development.

In the late 1960s, while a VISTA volunteer, I did community organizing in low-income public housing. In addressing issues that mattered to our neighbors, we drew on social action strategies and disruptive tactics used at the time. During the 1970s and 1980s, my colleagues and I helped develop and apply interventions for community-based organizations including training programs, e.g., for job-finding (Mathews and Fawcett, 1984), agency-based voter registration (e.g., Fawcett, Seekins, and Silber, 1988), lifeline utility rates (Seekins, Maynard-Moody, and Fawcett, 1987), and advocacy organizations in the disability rights and independent living movement (Balcazar, Seekins, Fawcett, and Hopkins, 1990). In the 1980s and 1990s, we developed an agenda-setting and social planning approach, known as the Concerns Report method, for people sharing a common place or neighborhood (Schriner and Fawcett, 1988), concern (e.g., about community health, Paine, Francisco, and Fawcett, 1994), or experience such as being low-income (Seekins and Fawcett, 1987) or having a physical disability (Suarez de Balcazar, Bradford and Fawcett, 1988). In the 1990s, my colleagues and I worked closely with community partnerships and grant makers involved in initiatives to prevent substance abuse (Fawcett, Lewis, et al., 1997; Paine-Andrews, Fawcett, et al., 1996), cardiovascular diseases (Paine-Andrews, Harris, et al., 1997), and adolescent pregnancy (Paine-Andrews, Vincent, Fawcett, et al., 1996); and to promote child well-being and urban neighborhood development.

Family background as an Irish Catholic and first-generation college student contributed to my embracing social justice as a goal, and social action (and related conflict) as a sometimes necessary means of change. Professional training as a behavioral scientist predisposed me to see societal problems in the *behavior* of people—both those experiencing problems and those in power—and to focus on changing the *environment*, the conditions under which people act (Fawcett, 1991). Practice in community psychology highlighted the value of collaborative partnerships; and work

in public health, the value of making an impact at the level of the whole population (e.g., neighborhood, city or town, county). Finally, collaborating with foundations and other grant makers helped clarify the importance of changing the broader context or system in which communities attempt to address what matters to them.

SPECIFIC LESSONS ON COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND CHANGE

This section summarizes some lessons learned from the author's experience with community organization practice, and especially from senior practitioners who wrote reflections for this book. The citations appearing without dates refer to those background papers. Lessons are stated as propositions, assumptions, principles, and values related to the work. They are highlighted in italics and organized by broad topics related to community organization and change. They need to be weighed against one another in particular contexts.

Lessons on Community Context

The propositions that follow reflect accumulated wisdom about how context affects community work.

High-profile commissions and reports create conditions for experimentation and optimism about public problem solving (Brager, Perlman). For example, during the 1960s, the President's Commission on Juvenile Delinquency helped spawn innovative efforts such as those of Mobilization for Youth in New York City. Such commissions help set the public agenda by highlighting what should be addressed and how (Cobb and Elder, 1972; Kingdon, 1995). Prominent reports frame explanations for societal problems—for example, by focusing attention on poverty as a "root cause" of many societal problems. They also feature promising alternative solutions—for instance, identifying legal assistance for the poor as an innovative model for problem solving.

Multiple models of community organization practice may be necessary to fit the variety of contexts in which community work is done (Rothman). For example, social planning or locality development strategies may fit contexts of consensus about common purposes such as working together to reduce violence. By contrast, the strategy of social action, with its disruptive activity and related conflict, may be more appropriate in contexts of conflicting interests, such as organizing to change wages and other conditions of the workplace.

Crosscutting issues are good contexts for community organization practice (Barry). Some community issues—for example, neighborhood safety

or substance abuse—affect the majority of people who share a common place. As such, they offer a solid basis around which a critical mass of local people can work together. When community organization efforts involve people of diverse income and power—such as crime and violence that affects people across income—prospects for substantive change are enhanced.

Community organization cannot be completely divorced from politics, or from controversy (Austin, Rothman, Turner). Consider the case of people coming together in a rural community to address issues of toxic waste and environmental pollution. Public debate may focus on both the economic interests of affected businesses and the health concerns of local residents. When the interests of different parties cannot be maximized simultaneously, community organization efforts inevitably invoke politics: the art of reconciling or adjusting competing interests.

Poor people can make substantial gains (or losses) during periods of tumultuous change, and related realignment of political parties (Cloward and Piven). Would there have been a Civil Rights Act of 1964 without rioting (and a realignment of the Democratic party)? Political parties seek to avoid or terminate mass protest—and other apparently unorganized behavior—by changing (or appearing to change) policies, programs, and practices related to voiced concerns. Since mass protest is something those in power act to avoid, it is an important means by which poor people—with otherwise limited resources—can achieve power and influence.

Strategies used in Community Organization should match the times. In times of turmoil, mobilizing those affected by the issues, such as through protests or other disruptive action, may yield maximum gains (Cloward and Piven). By contrast, in those (often long times) between periods of mass mobilization, community organization might use less conflict-oriented approaches, such as locality development or collaborative partnerships, to define and pursue common purposes.

Mass protest and grassroots Community Organization can work together (Cloward and Piven). When public protests and other forms of disruption increase, so do the grassroots organizations that address prevailing issues. For example, protests regarding pro-life (antiabortion) interests were associated with increases in local organizations supporting this and other related causes. When public concern declines, so does organizing at the grass roots. Although protest nourishes organization, the reverse does not hold; organization does not engender protest (it may even retard it).

Community organizations form when (and not before) people are ready to be organized (Turner). Although organizations may exist to promote interest in an issue, such as child hunger, people come together only when significant numbers of people care about the issue and feel that their

actions can make a difference. A particular challenge is discovering (and engendering) those conditions in which issues—such as child hunger or homelesness—matter to large numbers of people who share a common place or experience.

Those institutions that seek to avoid conflict and controversy make a difficult base from which to do community organization work (Austin). Consider the case of a school-community initiative to prevent adolescent pregnancy or HIV/AIDS. Although schools are well positioned to deliver information and health services to youth, school officials often oppose providing sexuality education or enhanced access to contraceptives for those who choose to be sexually active. Human service agencies and educational institutions that rely on public monies may be poor choices as lead agencies in controversial community organization efforts.

Lessons on Community Planning

Societal and community problems are evidence that institutions are not functioning for people (Spergel). Much of the framing of societal problems in the 1980s and 1990s focused on personal attributes of those immediately affected. For example, stated "causes" of high rates of youth crime may highlight the values and behavior of youth and their families such as "poor anger control" or "bad parenting." Such analyses rarely emphasize the contribution of broader environmental conditions, such as nonavailability of jobs or chronic stresses associated with low income, and the institutions responsible for them. In addition to individual responsibility, public institutions—such as schools, business, religious organizations, and government—should be held accountable for widespread problems in living.

We must set realistic goals for community organization efforts (Perlman). Community-based initiatives often overpromise, particularly with grant makers. Establishing unrealistic objectives—for example, to reduce academic (school) failure by 50 percent in the next two years—sets the group up for perceived failure. Organizations should carefully assess the feasibility of their proposed aims.

If we set (only) modest goals, we will likely achieve less (Brager). Although goals ought be achievable, they should also be challenging. Objectives can be overly modest, for example, to reduce rates of school failure (now at 80 percent) by 10 percent within three years. Insufficiently challenging objectives may not bring forth the necessary effort, resources, or degree of change needed to address the community's concern.

Social planning can engage experts in helping address societal problems, particularly when there is consensus on the issue (Barry, Rothman). We can advance locally valued purposes by engaging technical experts

and local citizens in defining problems and solutions. Outside experts, such as university-based researchers or public officials, can assist in obtaining and interpreting data, facilitating the process of setting priorities, and identifying promising alternatives. Planning need not be limited to the traditional roles of facilitating coordination and communication among health and human service agencies (Barry).

Locality development or self-help efforts can also assist in addressing community issues (Rothman, Turner). Local people have the experiential knowledge to come together to define local issues, such as neighborhood safety or jobs, and take action in addressing them. Such self-help efforts have their roots in the settlement house movement in urban neighborhoods. They are guided by respect for the autonomy of local people to decide (and act on) what matters to them (Berry).

Local control can hinder collaboration at broader levels of planning (Berry). Planning at higher levels than the neighborhood, city, or town may be necessary to address the broader conditions that affect community organization efforts. For example, the growing concentration of poverty in the urban core, a result of regional planning decisions and other broader policies, is a structural issue that affects community development efforts within inner-city neighborhoods (Jargowsky, 1997). Although desirable for community building, strong local control may actually hinder the broader planning and coordination necessary to address local issues.

Lessons on Community Action and Mobilization

Each individual has the capacity for self-determination, self-help, and improvement (Berry). A basic assumption of community organization is that people most affected by local concerns can do something about them. This "strengths" perspective highlights people's assets and abilities, not their deficits and limitations. While acknowledging personal and community competence, we also recognize the importance of environmental supports and barriers that affect engagement in community life such as the opportunities for, and consequences of, community action.

You can't do it by yourself (Barry, Turner). Addressing what matters to local people—good health, education, and jobs, for example—is beyond any one of us. The idea of "ecology"—interactions among organisms and the environment—helps us see community action as occurring within a web of relationships. Community life is enhanced when individual strengths are joined in common purpose, an expression of the principle of interdependence. We are interconnected: Each of us has a responsibility to make this a world we all value.

Strong leaders are present in even the most economically deprived communities (Turner). Authentic leaders—those who enable constituents

to see higher possibilities, and pursue them together—are among us, although not always acknowledged by those in authority. When doing community organizing in low-income public housing, I found that a simple question helped in "discovering" local leaders: "To whom do children go when they are hurt (and their parent or guardian is not home)?" Such questions help us discover the "servant leaders" (Greenleaf, 1997) among us: those who "lead" by addressing the interests of their "followers."

Community practitioners should never get used to the terrible conditions they see in their community work (Schwartz). Those doing community work, particularly in low-income communities, are exposed to horrible things: children in uncaring and unhealthy environments; adults without adequate food, clothing, and shelter; and the absence of other components essential for a decent life. Practitioners need to know how they are feeling about what they see and hear, perhaps disclosing experiences and feelings with colleagues to help support each other. They must also decide how to use those feelings—such as anger about conditions in which some people live—to energize and sustain the work.

People's beliefs and values enable them to stay committed (Barry, Spergel). To make a difference, those doing community work must be in it for the long haul. People's values, such as fairness or respect for the dignity of others, help sustain their efforts. For instance, a personal or family history of discrimination—a common experience for many ethnic minorities—may predispose us to embrace the value of social justice, and to work for equality of opportunity.

The work of Community Organization is like that of a "secular church" (Berry). Religious institutions help shape our beliefs about what is right and good, such as our responsibility to care for others. Community-based organizations, such as a homeless coalition or tenants' rights organization, call us to serve the common good—things beyond ourselves. As such, they enable us to devote our lives to higher purposes, while working in this world.

Community practitioners have few opportunities to reflect on their work (Perlman). Those doing the work of community building are often consumed by its demands. For example, leaders and staff of community-based organizations rarely take time to consider lessons learned about community action, barriers and resources, or other features of the work. Personal reflection journals and periodic group retreats help leaders and groups to reflect, to literally "bend back" and review initial purposes and recent directions. As such, they promote "praxis": the joining of understanding (theory) and action (practice).

Responding to events and opportunities to build community often takes us beyond what we know (Rothman). Community practice is largely an art

form. Effective intervention is shaped more by trial and error than by tested general statements about the conditions under which specified interventions (the independent variable) effect desired behavior and outcome (the dependent variables). Yet, attention to the conditions that matter to local people—crime, drug use, and poverty, for example—cannot await the findings of research trials. We must be decisive in the face of uncertainty, even when the scientific evidence for a chosen course of action is inadequate (Schwartz).

Lessons on Opposition and Resistance

Societal problems sometime serve the interests of those in power (Brager, Spergel). For example, a regulatory policy that permits environmental polluters to go unpunished serves the economic interests of businesses that pollute, as well as those elected and appointed officials who may benefit from campaign contributions or bribes. Similarly, the existence of drugs and violence may indirectly benefit elected officials since they often gain public support when they rant against perpetrators of drugs and violence. When those in authority oppose community action efforts (or ignore appeals for substantive intervention), there may be a disconnect between the public interest (common good) and the private interests of those with disproportionate influence.

Racial and ethnic tension and controversies have disrupted and destroyed many community organization efforts (Austin). Race and ethnic differences matter in this work. For instance, most African Americans share a common history of discrimination based on race—such as being followed more closely in a store or being ignored by cabs in a city. When you are an ethnic minority, people may assume they can think and speak for you, even if they have given no evidence that they care about you. Distrust of the "other" (the majority or minority culture) may breed conflict that disrupts reciprocity and social ties among people of different races and cultures (Shipler, 1997).

Social action tactics, such as disruptive protest, have many detractors (Brager). Participating in (or supporting) protest can be dangerous, especially for those who remain in the community. For example, following a school boycott launched by residents of a low-income public housing project, it was my friend Myrtle Carter, a welfare mother and visible leader, who was subjected to police harassment. She was arrested and jailed for a minor parking violation while we outside organizers who were also part of the effort experienced only small inconveniences. Those using protest tactics should expect those in power to retaliate, even by establishing criminal penalties for particularly effective disruptive actions such as strikes (Cloward and Piven).

Less in-your-face social action approaches can produce a strong political base from which to make change (Austin). For example, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) currentlyappears to be relatively effective in attracting support (and avoiding opposition) for its causes. Consistent with the *I Ching* and other statements of Eastern philosophies, less direct or forceful actions may be less likely to beget opposition and adverse reaction.

Opposition and resistance may come in a variety of forms (Brager). An analysis of the advocacy literature suggests different ways in which change efforts may be blunted. These include deflecting attention from the issue, delaying a response, denying the problem or request, discounting the problem or the group, deceiving the public, dividing and conquering the organization, appeasing leadership with short-term gains, discrediting group members, or attempting to destroy the group with slur campaigns through the media (Altman et al., 1994). Skilled practitioners can help group members recognize (and avoid or counteract) sources and modes of opposition.

Community organizations may respond to opposition with appropriate counteractions (Austin, Cloward, and Piven). Consider the case of local welfare officials (the opposition) who discount claims of a disability rights group (the advocates) that people with disabilities are being denied assistance unfairly. To counteract this opposition, disability advocates might document the number and kinds of cases denied, and use media advocacy about the consequences of denying eligibility to arouse public concern. Depending on the nature and form of opposition, appropriate counteractions may include reframing the issues, turning negatives into positives, going public with opponents' tactics, concentrating the organization's strength against the opponents' weakness, and knowing when to negotiate (Altman et al., 1994).

Opposition to change may be like peeling an onion. Advocates should expect multiple layers of opposition and resistance to community and systems change (Brager). For example, community organizations working for better schools may face resistance initially from school board officials; later, from local principals; and still later, from teachers. Peel off one layer, and another form of resistance or opposition may be there to protect vested interests.

Lessons on Intervention and Maintenance of Efforts

The lessons that follow note assertions about implementation of strategies and the maintenance of community organization activities.

The strategy of Community Organization should fit the situation (Alexander, Rothman). The broad and specific means of intervention should match the context and the goals. For example, social planning—

using technical information often with the guidance of outside experts—may assist in defining goals when people share common interests. Similarly, locality development—featuring self-help efforts of local people—may be appropriate for reducing a particular problem, such as substance abuse or neighborhood safety, around which there is widespread agreement. By contrast, social action—with its disruptive tactics and related conflict—may be needed in contexts of opposing interests, such as in reducing discrimination or disparities in income or power.

Using multiple strategies usually has advantage over any single strategy. Some initiatives—for instance, a campaign for school reform—get stuck using one preferred means of action, such as collaborative planning or disruptive tactics, even when the goals or conditions shift. By invoking only one strategy, the organization's actions may be easier to ignore and the benefits of complementary approaches may go untapped. For example, the threat of disruptive tactics (social action) may make support for self-help efforts (locality development) more likely (Perlman). Flexibility in strategy, and use of multiple means, may enhance community efforts and outcomes.

Being in two cultures promotes creativity (Rothman). Some community practitioners operate in more than one system of influence. For example, those who combine research *and* practice must respect the influences of both academic disciplines and members of community-based organizations. Being open to different audiences helps integrate disparate ideas, discover novel solutions, and transform practice.

The work of Community Organization takes time, and follow-through (all). Mobilizing people for action requires substantial time and effort (Perlman). Making the calls and personal contacts to bring about a change in school policy, for example, cannot be done solely by volunteers. The stimulation and coordination community work, like any other valued work, should be paid for (Turner). Without salaries for community mobilizers or organizers, follow-through on planned actions suffers.

External support may be both a necessity and a trap for community organizations (Cloward and Piven). Community organization efforts are seldom sustained without external resources. Yet, financial support usually has strings attached. For example, accepting money from foundations or the government may restrict advocacy efforts. Although often a necessity, outside resources may come at the price of compromising the group's goals or available means of action.

Community organizations often fade away (Cloward and Piven, Perlman). When the issues around which community organizations were initially formed begin to fade, so may the organizations. For example, a taxpayer rights organization may dissolve when its goal of blocking a particular public expenditure, such as a school bond issue, is resolved. Those

organizations that endure after the issues subside may lose members unless they reinvent themselves to address other emerging issues.

Organizations need small wins. "Small wins" are shorter-term, controllable opportunities to make a tangible difference (Weick, 1984). For example, a good neighborhood organizer might work for improved trash pickup or more streetlights to provide (literally) visible benefits of group action. Without victories, community organizations can neither retain their members nor attract new ones (Cloward and Piven).

Lessons on Community Change

The central ideal of community organization practice is public benefits, not certification (Schwartz). Practitioners' interests should always be subordinate to those of the people served. Yet, when disciplines such as social welfare or public health market training for "professionals" in the work of Community Organization, they risk creating professions in which practitioners benefit more than clients. Those professions that certify people—and not promising practices or demonstrably effective methods—may give primacy to the interests of professionals (or guild interests), not those experiencing the concerns.

Community Organization must go beyond the process of bringing people together. For some practitioners, dialogue among representatives of different groups is a sufficient "outcome" of community development efforts. Yet, local people who come together to address what matters to them are usually interested in going beyond talk to action and results. Community organization efforts should bring about tangible benefits such as community change, problem solving, and enhanced social justice (Rothman).

The primary need is not for individuals to adjust to their world, but for environments to enable people to attain their goals (Schwartz). Much framing of societal problems focuses on the deficits of those most affected. For example, prominent labels for causes of academic failure might include "poor motivation" (of youth) or "poor monitoring" (by parents). Alternatively, analyses of academic failure might address such environmental conditions as few opportunities to engage in academic behavior (in schools) and limited opportunities for employment (following school). Community health and well-being are private *and* public matters, calling for both individual *and* social responsibility (Barry).

Community-based organizations can function as catalysts for change. Effective community organizations transform the environment; they alter programs, policies, and practices related to the group's mission (Fawcett et al., 1995). For example, a disability rights organization might modify policies regarding employment discrimination against people with disabilities or establish new job training programs that accommodate people with

different impairments. In their role as catalysts for change, community organizations convene others, broker relationships, and leverage resources for shared purposes.

Lessons on Systems Change

The following propositions regarding systems change refer to alterations in the broader conditions that affect community work at the local level.

Interventions should include systems changes that reflect the "root causes" of the problem. Consider the typical interventions for most societal problems—for example, job training to address unemployment or drug awareness programs to counter substance abuse. Such initiatives usually try to change the behavior of those with limited power who are closest to the "problem," for instance, low-income adults (unemployment) or youth (substance abuse). When used alone, service programs and targeted interventions, such as those for so-called "at risk" adults or youth, may deflect attention away from more "root" causes, such as poverty and the conditions of opportunity that affect behavior at a variety of levels. Resolution of many societal issues, such as crime or unemployment, requires systems changes, including changes in decisions made by corporate and political decision makers, at levels higher than the local community (Turner).

Systems change does not necessarily occur simply by reporting felt needs to appointed or elected officials. For those with high economic or political status, simply expressing a concern may have influence on decisions that affect them. Available to such groups are a variety of traditional means of exerting influence including petitioning, lobbying, influencing the media, supporting political candidates, and voting in large numbers (Cloward and Piven). These means are largely unavailable to those most affected by many societal problems, however, such as children and the poor. Marginalized groups lack the resources to exert influence in conventional ways.

The great power of social movements is in communicating a different vision of the world (Cloward and Piven). Marginalized groups use the drama of protest—and the conflict it provokes—to display realities not widely understood or regarded as important. For example, the media may cover a strike and related protests by farm workers or coal miners, and the violence it often evokes from owners, the police, or others in power. Media coverage helps convey the story of conditions faced by those protesting and the unfairness of the action (or inaction) of private and public institutions that are targeted. The dramatic nature of protest and related conflict can help politicize voters who, through enhanced public support of the positions of marginalized groups, can exert influence on those in power.

Community organizations should seek changes commensurate with their power. Since ignoring them is likely and retaliation is possible, small

organizations with limited power should avoid seeking fundamental changes in the system (Austin). For example, a single grassroots organization in a low-income neighborhood may not be positioned to effect systems changes such as altering the priorities of grant makers who support work in the community. However, sometimes small and scrappy organizations may succeed in bringing about community change when their bulkier counterparts do not.

Community (and broader systems) change can be effected through collaboration (Barry). Collaboration involves alliances among groups that share risks, resources, and responsibilities to achieve their common interests (Himmelman, 1992). For example, local community-based organizations interested in the well-being of children can link with each other to effect local programs (e.g., mentoring), policies (e.g., flextime to be with children after school), and practices (e.g., adults caring for children not their own). In addition, broader partnerships with grant makers, government agencies, and business councils can affect the conditions in which change occurs at the community level—for example, by altering grant-making programs to support collaborative work or promoting child-friendly business policies through industrial revenue bonds or new corporate policies. Collaborative partnerships help bring about community and systems change when they link local people to resources and institutions, at the multiple levels in which change should occur, to address common interests.

Lessons on Community-Level Outcomes

The lessons that follow summarize insights about indicators of societal problems, substantive change at the community level, and expectations we should have about such change.

Societal problems often reoccur. Consider the problem of gang violence that occurred after World War II and reoccurred in the 1990s (Spergel). Broad social conditions—wide disparity of income, weak social ties, and related mistrust of others—appear to affect the likelihood of societal problems such as increased death rates, infant mortality, and perhaps youth violence (Wilkinson, 1996). Improvements achieved in one era may need to be reestablished by future generations who must again transform the environmental conditions that support the reoccurrence of societal problems.

Most community efforts "chip" away at the problem. The majority of community interventions do not match the scale of the problem (Perlman, Turner). For example, a welfare reform program may prepare ten unemployed people to compete for only one available job, or create 100 jobs in a community with thousands of unemployed. We often effect small

changes in a context that itself remains unchanged (Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, 1974).

Real change is rare. Significant improvements in community-level outcomes—reducing rates of adolescent pregnancy or academic failure by 50 percent or more—are rather unusual. Yet, in requests for grants, community-based organizations often promise (and grant makers expect) statements of objectives that indicate significant improvements as a result of only modest investments over a short time. We should not perpetuate myths about what most interventions can actually accomplish (Spergel).

Development of community leadership may be a positive by-product of even "failed" community efforts (Austin, Turner). Although an initiative may "fail" to produce statistically significant changes in community benchmarks or indicators, it may develop new leaders or build capacity to address new issues in the future. For instance, a public health initiative that produces only modest reductions in rates of adolescent pregnancy may develop the capacity to effect changes that matter, such as four years later when the group switches its efforts from adolescent pregnancy to HIV/AIDS or to child abuse. Community documentation and evaluation should help us see what is actually achieved by community initiatives, including evidence of intermediate outcomes (e.g., community and systems change) and other indicators of success or "failure" (i.e., community capacity over time and across issues) (Fawcett, Paine-Andrews, Francisco, et al , 1997)

Optimal health and development for all people may be beyond the capacity of many communities to achieve, but it is not beyond what we should seek (Barry). Most community-based efforts, such as to create healthy environments for all our children, will fall short of their objectives. Yet, justice requires that we create conditions in which all people can make the most of their inherently unequal endowments (Adler, 1981). Support for community initiatives should be guided by what we must do for current and future generations, not by what limited gains we have made in the past.

CONCLUSION

The fundamental purpose of Community Organization—to help discover and enable people's shared goals—is informed by values, knowledge, and experience. This article outlined lessons distilled from experience, particularly that of an earlier generation of community organization practitioners (each with an average of over 40 years of experience) who embraced the value of social justice. The insights were organized under broad themes of community organization practice.

Most community work proceeds unaided by a clear theory of action. Emerging models of Community Organization and change (e.g., Fawcett et al., 1995) may evolve into testable frameworks for practice. Multiple case study designs (Yin, 1988), and interrupted time series designs (Cook and Campbell, 1979), could help examine several key scientific questions including: What combinations of strategies, such as social planning and social action, effect community (and systems) change optimally? Under what conditions? What amount and kind of community (and systems) changes effect community-level outcomes? Under what conditions? More refined theories of action—particularly those further informed by data from field research—might help guide the practice of community organization.

To remain viable, the multidisciplinary field of Community Organization must improve its science base, and its legitimacy as an area of scholarly inquiry (Rothman). Many of those drawn to community work are predisposed to "doing" or action, not systematic research or reflection. Time for even disciplined reflection is severely limited by demands of the work. Knowledge of community ways may be lacking in many trained researchers, and skill in methods of community research and intervention may be rare among practitioners. Environmental factors—such as lack of recognition and reinforcement from peers (including promotion and tenure)—make community research a potentially risky path for academic researchers. Without grants and others resources for community research, its practice may remain limited. Finally, insularity—separation from others doing the work, both within and between communities, and across disciplines—is another barrier to understanding, support, and effectiveness of community research and practice.

Community Organization often has a *bottom-up* or grassroots quality: people with relatively little power coming together at the local level to address issues that matter to them. For example, grassroots efforts may involve planning by members of a neighborhood association, protests by a tenants' organization, or self-help efforts of low-income families to build local housing. Yet, Community Organization may also function as a *top-down* strategy, as when elected or appointed officials—or others in power—join allies in advancing policies or resource allocations that serve their interests. Bottom-up and top-down approaches to community organization may work in conflict, such as when appointed officials conspire to make voter registration of emerging minority groups more difficult. Top-down and bottom-up efforts may also work in concert, as when grassroots mobilization, such as letter writing or public demonstrations, help support policy changes advanced by cooperative elected or appointed officials working at broader levels.

Community organization strategies may be used to serve (or hinder) the values and aims of particular interest groups. Consider the issue of

abortion: Those organizing under the pro-choice banner may use protest tactics to advance policies and practices that further individual freedom (a woman's "right" to choose whether to have an abortion). Alternatively, those working on the pro-life side may organize to seek changes consistent with the value of security and survival (an unborn child's "right" to life). Depending on our values and interests, we may applaud (or denounce) the use of similar disruptive tactics by proponents (or opponents) on the issue.

What is the relationship between personal values and qualities—and the experiences and environments that shaped them—and the work of community organization and change? Personal background, such as a basic spirituality or a history of discrimination associated with ethnic minority status, can predispose a practitioner to embrace particular values, such as social justice or equality, consistent with the work of community organization. What qualities and behaviors of community organizers, such as respect for others and willingness to listen, help bring people together? Many of these attributes (and behaviors)—including clarity of vision, capacity to support and encourage, trustworthiness and tolerance of ambiguity—are similar to those of other leaders (Gardner, 1990; Heifetz, 1994). How do we cultivate such natural leaders, and nurture and support their work in bringing people together? Further research may help clarify the relationship between personal qualities and behaviors, such as those of the "servant" (Dass and Gorman, 1985) or "servant leader" (Greenleaf, 1997), the broader environment that nurtures or hinders them, and the outcomes of community organization efforts.

Finally, leadership in community work may begin with a *few good questions*: What is desired now, in this place, by these people? What is success? Under what conditions is improvement possible? How can we establish (and sustain) conditions for effective community problem solving—over time, and across concerns? How would we know it? Imagine a "living democracy" (Lappe and DuBois, 1994): large numbers of people, in many different communities, engaged in dialogue about shared concerns and collective action toward improvement. Perhaps these lessons—inspired by reflections of an engaged generation of community organization practitioners—can help us better understand and improve the essential work of democracy: people coming together to address effectively issues that matter to them.

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