

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE NEWSLETTER

Prepared for the Sociological Practice Section of the
American Sociological Association
Winter 2002

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ASA's 97th Annual Meeting in Chicago

A note from the Chair

The 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association is scheduled for August 16-19 in lively downtown Chicago. Chicago is one of my favorite cities, and I seldom hear disagreement on that point. We have a desirable date in 2002--Friday, August 16 (the first day of the meeting).

Sociological Practice Program August 16, 2002

The submission deadline is January 10, 2002. Those submitting papers are asked to use the on-line submission service at the ASA web site: <<http://www.asanet.org>>. On-line submission via the ASA web site opens on November 20. (NOTE: If you have difficulty submitting via the web site, please contact Rick Stephens or me so we can help solve the problem.)

The Section invites submissions for paper sessions on "**Sociological Practice in a Changing World**," organized by W. Richard Stephens, Eastern Nazarene College, <stephensr@enc.edu>.

Please contact Rick Stephens if you have any questions about the sessions or James Hougland if you have questions about other aspects of the Section's activities.

A Note from the Chair

James Hougland, University of Kentucky

For all of us, since September 11, 2001 our lives have changed – probably forever. My challenges from the “fly-over” territory of Kentucky are trivial compared to many members of the Section who live and work near the sites of the tragedy, but I hope you might bear with me as I share a few thoughts.

I am among those members of the Section on Sociological Practice whose normal responsibilities include teaching. Like most of my colleagues, I devoted significant class time immediately following the events to a wide-ranging discussion of the events themselves. I made some (perhaps lame) attempts to relate them to the subject matter of the courses, but I think the real value of that time was simply in allowing students to express their thoughts and fears. Eventually, though, one must get back to business, and I think this includes returning to the official subject matter for the classes one is teaching.

I generally march into my classes secure in the knowledge that I am imparting a perspective that students really need to understand, but my confidence in the relevance and usefulness of my teaching is, as I write this, somewhat shaken. What can I do or say that will possibly help my students to contend with a world that I can no longer claim to understand? To the extent that I am approaching an answer to that question, I think it revolves around my orientation as a sociologist who is committed to the *application* of sociological insights and methods.

The society that is now developing in the United States will never be quite the same as the one that existed prior to September 11. Focusing only on a few domestic issues, we must look forward to a society in which the ever-tenuous balance between security and civil liberties is going to be contested in significant and possibly unprecedented ways. We may experience episodes of ethnic and religious hostility that are painful and divisive. The stability of some of our economic institutions may be challenged. Those in positions of authority may face unprecedented challenges of leadership. It is not difficult to imagine scenarios leading to a devastating crisis of confidence in major institutions. And that is only the beginning of what could be a very long and troubling list.

I have no illusion that sociology will provide “the solution” to such challenges, but I think that sociological practitioners have much to contribute in these unsettled times. During a period of rapid and troubling change, obtaining and tracking accurate information about public opinion and attitudes will be very important, and this is something that sociologists do very well. As organizations deal with changes, sociologists will be in a position to do the evaluations and other research that may help to keep them on course. Sociologists who engage in clinical interventions will have innumerable opportunities to help communities, families, and other social units in crisis. Sociologists who administer organizations providing social services are likely to draw on sociological expertise as new challenges emerge. As we engage in such activities, we probably will be doing so with a humbling awareness that we don’t know all of the answers. Fortunately, however, the intellectual and methodological tools of sociology equip us to ask many of the appropriate questions, even in challenging and rapidly changing situations.

With that in mind, I have returned to the classroom with a new humility but also with a commitment to help my students gain the insight, the methodological tools, and inquisitiveness to ask useful questions in the face of possibly unprecedented challenges. I wish all members of the Section on Sociological Practice well as you go about your business of contributing in so many ways to a better and more civil world.

Call for Nominations

2002 Awards

The Section on Sociological Practice invites nominations for two awards to be presented in 2002.

American Sociological Association Section on Sociological Practice: William Foote Whyte Award

The William Foote Whyte Award is for individuals who have made notable contributions to sociological practice, which can include several of the following elements: outstanding clinical or applied work, exceptional service to the section, publications that advance both the theory and methods of sociological practice, or mentoring and training of students for careers in sociological practice.

American Sociological Association Section on Sociological Practice: Student Practitioner Award

The Student Practitioner Award is for a promising effort, contribution, project, or paper by a graduate student in the area of sociological practice. Products of graduate-level classes, internships, or independent projects will be considered.

Nominations should include:

- Name and contact information for nominator and nominee
- A brief statement from the nominator as to why the nominee should be considered

For the William Foote Whyte Award:

- *A curriculum vitae, résumé, or narrative describing the nominee's career*

For the Student Practitioner Award:

- A copy of the paper or other project
- Other materials as needed to support the nomination

Please send nominations to:

Dr. James Hougland
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Phone (859) 257-4417
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E-mail: soc125@ukv.edu

Call for Papers

Sociological Practice: A Journal of Clinical and Applied Sociology. This is a call for papers for a special issue, "Impact of Contemporary Theory on Sociological Practice." The issue will focus on contemporary theorists who have or should have significant impact on sociological practice assessing their influence or potential influence on, for example, practitioner goals, values, client selection, intervention strategies, theoretical orientations, methodologies, ethics, organization or the status of sociology as a discipline. Deadline March 1, 2002. Submit papers to Bob Dotzler, SP Guest Editor, 1216 Lago Road, Chesapeake, VA 23322 USA. See "Instructions for Contributors" on the Sociological Practice Association website: <<http://www.socpractice.org>><http://www.socpractice.org>. For additional information, contact the guest editor at dotzler@erols.com.

Call for Papers

2002 Annual Meeting
Sociological Practice Association

to be held at the
Norfolk Waterside Marriott Hotel
Norfolk, Virginia

May 30-June 1, 2002

From Knowledge to Use--Sociological Practitioners as Bridge Builders

Submit session or paper proposals to:

Karen Patricia Williams, Ph.D, karen.williams@ht.msu.edu

or

Robert J. Dotzler, Ph.D., dotzler@erols.com

(Additional information will be placed on the SPA website and in the SPA Newsletter.)

Feature: Point of View

Note from the Editor: We will launch a new feature with this issue, an article stating a new point of view on an important practical and theoretical issue. In each issue, either I or a guest editor will address a topic that has implications for both society and our field.

What Kind Of Change Enables Transformation?

Kathryn Goldman Schuyler, Alliant International University

Although much has been written about ‘empowerment’, ‘total quality’, ‘integrity’ and ‘teamwork,’ the effect on people throughout most organizations has not been positive. In my experience as an organizational consultant, far more people feel disturbed than pleased about the nature of change they have been living. Instead of feeling ‘empowered,’ they feel exhausted and somewhat over-used — a bit like Alice, in the Lewis Carroll story, who had to run faster and faster to stay in the same place. They agree with the Dupont manager I met on an airplane, who snorted and said “What a joke!” at the uses of these concepts in his company.

Can we, as organizational sociologists, learn to design and lead change processes that are truly supportive for people at work, while also increasing organizational effectiveness? Change processes that people can more readily integrate? Change process that are not imposed and therefore resisted? Change processes that support exploration and knowledge creation, rather than obedience and acceptance of hierarchy?

I have come to believe that the issue is not really the fact of change, but rather how we approach it. It is important to re-think our understanding of the nature of change and what it takes to create it. In recent years, American management assumed that forced breakthrough change enables major organizational shifts. As sociological practitioners, we know that this belief is not grounded either in experience or data. Data indicate that the majority of breakthrough change projects fail. We see this in Wall Street Journal articles on re-engineering that document the failure of over 60% of major, multi-million dollar projects. We see similar problems in work done to ‘flatten’ organizations in order to increase productivity.

I want to put forward a novel suggestion, but one that is grounded in years of practice. I think that the best and easiest way to create a vivid experience of significant change is via our bodies and somatic learning. If we enable people to experience and sense that they can change habits and patterns that seemed immutable, we can teach them how to generate their own simple and highly effective mental models for change leadership.

I have piloted this as a change process in a number of graduate seminars with sufficient success to be interested in developing the approach further and dialoguing with colleagues who have undertaken analogous initiatives.

Systems Thinking And Somatic Education

Both systems thinking and somatic education practices teach us similar things.

- (1) Breakthroughs occur when we create choice and multiplicity. When we enable people to experience differences among a range of options, a healthy person invariably selects the one that is most effective.
- (2) In learning new skills we need to slow down before we can speed up. And
- (3) we generally don’t assimilate change unless we experiment with ways of making it our own.

I am convinced that most people can better appreciate the value of these and other foundations for effective change integration if they first experience them personally. A powerful way to help them have such an experience is through using a method that lets them discover how to introduce change in the way they move and use their bodies.

Popular organization change models are based on the assumption that there is a dichotomy between change and pleasure. Most people believe that change is intrinsically difficult and painful and that the best one can do is “grin and bear it.” Starting from this point, they proceed to assume that resistance is inevitable. They then focus much of “change management” on dealing with resistance. Similarly, we “diagnose” problems and then try to fix them.

Instead, we can think in terms of a new somatic model that looks at change as it can occur in children, using movement. This approach, which I personally have grounded in sixteen years of practice as a certified Feldenkrais practitioner, is rooted theoretically in developmental psychology, philosophy, and mind science.¹ These authors make clear that we learn to think and develop our cognitive categories about the world via body-based interactions with it — initially with our mothers, and then with objects and other people. As Fogel vividly points out, all of these very basic experiences occur within a cultural context and thereby shape our views of what is “normal” or “abnormal” in life.² Using Feldenkrais work and other somatic approaches to learning, people are surprised to find change can be easy and pleasurable, rather than threatening or overwhelming. What if we taught them this within an organizational context and supported them in bringing this learning into their work? Instead of exhorting people to try harder, what if they learned somatically that it is more efficient to “try softer”? Would they bring such experimentation and a spirit of ease into their work? Mightn’t there be levels of improvement comparable to those that we are accustomed to seeing in personal movement learning? I have seen this take place through my graduate workshops.

Since my expertise among somatic approaches is with The *Feldenkrais Method*[®], I can best discuss how they work via a brief overview of this approach. Although typically viewed as a type of ‘bodywork’ or movement education, this method is actually a means for improving how people learn. The focus is on strengthening one’s capacity to notice small differences by enhancing awareness of oneself in motion and action. By drawing upon “non-habitual” movement patterns, the teacher helps the learner feel how s/he moves, rather than just moving automatically and without awareness. What is remarkable is that the introduction of awareness often leads to profound shifts at the level of personality as well.

The *Feldenkrais Method* enables people to learn new ways of moving through life without having to think about it. Rather than promoting cognitive learning, the movements work “behind” or “underneath” left-brain thinking processes to cause change in how people act and react. It has profoundly impacted the way I think about organizations, in addition to the way I consult.

¹ Behavioral scientists include Alan Fogel, *Developing Through Relationships: Origins of Communication, Self, and Culture*, 1993 and Esther Thelen and LB Smith, *A Dynamic Systems Approach to the Development of Cognition and Action*, 1994. In the literature on knowledge management, a major source is Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Philosophers who have re-thought these issues include George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 1987; Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 1987; and Francisco Varela et al., *The Embodied Mind*, 1991.

The *Feldenkrais Method*[®] of psychophysical re-education is widely used for increasing mobility in a wide range of situations. It is used internationally with those who are injured, in pain, have crippling neurological diseases such as cerebral palsy, and also to help performers and athletes discover ways to enhance their performance. It was developed over decades in the first half of the twentieth century by physicist, engineer, and martial artist Dr Moshe Feldenkrais, who published numerous books in addition to training roughly 350 students.

² Fogel, *op.cit.*, pp. 23 - 24.

Awareness — through movement is the heart of this approach. A basic assumption is that unless people know what they are actually doing, they can't do what they want. A person who does what s/he wants, not superficially, but deeply, is seen as living a healthy life. 'Health,' in this context, means "fully living one's dreams" —rather than putting them off, declaring them impractical, or giving up and pretending they never existed.

Awareness is essential for changing this situation. However, rather than asking people to sit still or become aware of intangibles (as does meditation), the Feldenkrais method focuses on mundane and concrete aspects of life. It teaches awareness indirectly, in the process of helping people to become more comfortable and effective in their bodies. Since life intrinsically involves movement and action, the method aims to enable people to become more easily aware of what they are doing while in action.

This contrasts with most medical approaches to improving an injured or problematic part of the body, which focus on that part. It may be massaged, immobilized in a brace, or moved repeatedly to strengthen it or increase its range of motion. Rarely is it looked at as part of a larger and more complex series of systems. However, from the Feldenkrais perspective, when a hand does not function well, the difficulty is not in the hand — but is more commonly in the organization of the hand for action, which means in the shoulder, ribs, and breathing. In order to improve the hand, we need to work with much of the body. If we focus on the problem, the person's awareness remains with "having a problem". If we improve everything else, we are altering the organization that perhaps induced and certainly supports the existence of the problem. This enables the problem to improve – and sometimes to disappear entirely.

Conclusion

If change is making people unhappy, perhaps our approach to it is part of the problem. We *cause* much of the difficulty we think is inherent in change by the ways we think about ourselves, our work, and our organizations.

Change can be managed as a source of increased effectiveness and productivity. However, the nature of the work would shift in emphasis from planning large, scheduled change programs that "drive change through the organization" to interventions that

- ✓ enable people throughout an organization to experience themselves as somatic beings and use this as the ground for improving their decisions,
- ✓ help managers support people's learning in an atmosphere of both challenge (as now) *and* play,
- ✓ create physical work environments which help people feel great while working — environments that people do not just tolerate, but enjoy and experience as genuine expressions of the values and culture of their organization.

We can use our experience with somatics to shift some of the approaches that have lead organizations down a path that nobody wanted. Many people throughout the worlds of business, education, and government are now struggling with overwhelming change that leaves them feeling their lives are out of control. The paradigm of embodied change provides new perspectives and tools for eliciting fundamental change that does not damage but actually enhances the quality of their lives. When people experience themselves and their organizations as evolutionary, embodied networks instead of as static structures requiring force for change, major transformations become possible.

My experience suggests that personal and organizational breakthroughs thrive not on exhortation or commands, but on experimentation, movement, and awareness. By applying such an approach to leadership and change, we will get far better results than by forcing or cajoling people into breakthroughs they fear and resist.

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE AT THE NCSA

Jay Weinstein, Eastern Michigan University

The 2002 annual meeting of the North Central Sociological Association will focus on "Sociological Application: Accessing Access, Opportunity, and Change." The meeting will be held on April 18-21, at the Windsor Hilton, Windsor, Ontario. In response to this theme several sessions have been organized that feature members and friends of the ASA Section on Sociological Practice, including Section Chair, Jim Houglan. The topics and participants are listed below. We can still accommodate additional presenters and/or sessions (including roundtables). For further information, contact Jay Weinstein, NCSA Applied and Clinical Sociology Chair, Department of Sociology, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197. E-mail to: Weinst@aol.com.

Panel: The Varieties of Sociological Application

Chair and Discussant: James Houglan, University of Kentucky

Panelists: Tillman Rodabough, Baylor University, "Multi-method Research: Providing Data for Juvenile Curfew Policy."

Stephen F. Steele, Anne Arundel Community College, "Spreading the Word on Applied Sociology: Teaching and Writing for Undergraduate and Graduate level Audiences."

Tom Van Valey, Western Michigan University, "School Drug Surveys: A Vehicle for Policy Development."

Panel: Applied Sociology in the International Context

Organizer: David Huskins, University of Akron.

Research Session: Sociological Applications to Problems of Health and Disaster

Presenters: Lynn Clough, Summa Health System (Akron, Ohio), "Insight into the Patient's Experience of Managing Diabetes, Comorbidity and Poverty"

Denise Reiling, Eastern Michigan University, "When Disaster Strikes Your Research Site: Implications for Data Collection."

Victoria Ross, Western Michigan University, "Disaster Mental Health."

Research Session: Sociological Applications: Action Research in the Community

Presenters: Benjamin Ben-Baruch, StarWorks (Ann Arbor, MI), "Applying Action-Research And The Sociological Imagination In Work With Non-Profit Organizations"

Randy HaLuza-DeLay, CSoP Research and Consulting (Thunder Bay, Ontario), "When the Topic is Sensitive: Racialization and Social Cohesion."

Michael O'Neal, Augsburg College, "Finding Common Community Interests: Linking Neighborhoods through Mass Transit Design."

Roundtable: Sociological Applications: Access, Opportunity, Change.

Presider: TBA