

Editorial

Jean Ann Linney

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I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce my long time friend and colleague Abe Wandersman for his distinguished contributions to theory and research in community psychology.

I've known Abe for almost 30 years. For 21 of those years we were colleagues in the same department at the University of South Carolina. We've worked together on several kinds of projects including conference organizing, graduate student projects and dissertations, and the *Prevention Plus III* volume (Linney and Wandersman 1992). We've logged a lot of hours together!

Abe is not only among the most prolific in our field, but his work has always been interdisciplinary. He has an interesting and somewhat unusual educational history, one that probably couldn't be replicated in this day and age. His graduate study was done at Cornell University in personality and social psychology, with additional concentrations in social organization and change, environmental and ecological psychology, and child and family psychopathology. He followed graduate work with a full time internship at the Connecticut Valley Mental Health Center. The foundations of his interdisciplinary interests are surely reflected in his training.

I first met Abe when he gave a colloquium at the University of Virginia in 1978. He talked about work he was doing in Nashville on citizen participation in neighborhood organizations. At that time, models of prevention were a significant focus of debate in the field, and I remember listening to Abe and thinking that maybe he was on to something, but it was a stretch to see how this was going to advance our thinking about preventing maladjustment.

As we know, Abe went on to develop these early descriptive studies of citizen participation into models of community involvement, linking participation and notions of empowerment, with individual indicators of well being. His work in Nashville led to the Block Booster project in New York city, a planned initiative of grassroots organizing designed to stimulate citizen participation and through this field intervention, to learn about the processes that enhance and sustain, or undermine and thwart citizen involvement, and associated individual mental health and neighborhood-level effects.

With data from the Nashville project and the Block Booster studies to support his assertions, Abe became a persistent and persuasive advocate of citizen involvement and community coalitions as important strategies for enhancing mental health at the individual and neighborhood levels. His identification and experience with community coalitions led to an invitation to work with the Atlanta based Center for Drug Free Schools and Communities to develop training materials for community coalitions working to stem substance abuse in their communities. One of the outcomes of this collaboration was the *Prevention Plus III* approach to program evaluation. Abe's more recent work within the framework of Empowerment Evaluation and the *Getting To Outcomes* methodology grew from the this early program evaluation work.

Over the last 20 some years, I've had multiple opportunities to listen to Abe. I think it's fair to characterize his ideas as typically just off the mainstream of the times in terms of the central constructs of interest. He likes to test his ideas with students, with colleagues, with his wife, and probably anyone else who will listen. If you are on the receiving end, it's not uncommon to listen to Abe and think, "hmm, not sure where this is going." Yet with each sounding, he seems to elaborate and clarify his thinking,

J. A. Linney (✉)
University of Alabama, Birmingham, AL, USA
e-mail: jalinney@uab.edu

always focused on drafting models that link multiple levels of conceptualization.

His collaborative and grass roots process of developing ideas has resulted in 12 co-authored or edited books, 28 book chapters, and 52 papers—in the last 15 years alone. Many of these publications have been addressed to the practice community and to policymakers. He is well recognized in the program evaluation field in addition to community psychology. And, he's been influential in a number of state level initiatives to establish benchmark expectations for program evaluation by service providers.

His students and collaborators over the years include a number of accomplished and influential members of our field: David Chavis, Paul Florin, Matt Chinman, Pam Imm, Bill Hallman, John Prestby, Erin Morrissey, Maury Nation, Paul Flaspohler, Cindy Crusto, and Jessica Snell-Johns, to name a few. Each of them has pursued their own important

work with the imprint of Abe's unique blend of model-making and real world application.

For his extensive work and extended attention to the processes, effects and implications of participation and community coalitions, we recognize Abe Wandersman as the recipient of the 2005 award for distinguished contributions to theory and research in community psychology. His work has significantly advanced understanding of participatory process, empowerment and community engagement.

Reference

- Linney, J. A., & Wandersman, A. (1992). *Prevention Plus III: Assessing alcohol and other drug prevention programs at the school and community level*. Washington, DC: Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (Government Printing Office).