

## What is Swampscott and Why is it Important?

From: *Reflections on the Future of Community Psychology from the Generations after Swampscott: A Commentary and Introduction to the Special Issue*<sup>1</sup>

Jacob Kraemer Tebes with Ashley Simons-Rudolph

“It was an exciting time... They [Swampscott conference participants] wanted to intervene in social problems that were not explicitly mental health in nature, and that's why they talked about becoming “social change agents” – a vision that was a sea change for American psychology”

## How and Why Did Community Psychology Begin?

“Community psychology” in the U.S. emerged in the 1960s in response to the limitations of psychology in solving social problems. Stimulated by the community mental health movement, early developments that led to the birth of the field included:

- the action research of the Yale Psycho-Educational Clinic<sup>2</sup>
- the community-based Fairweather Lodge program<sup>3</sup>
- teaching children competencies, such as interpersonal social problem solving skills<sup>4</sup>
- early identification of children with behavior problems in the Primary Mental Health Project<sup>5</sup>
- the seminal workforce analysis done for the 1961 Presidential Commission showing an urgent need for prevention services<sup>6</sup>

### At the Swampscott Conference....

Thirty-nine conference participants came together to define how psychologists could impact social change and policy beyond psychological therapeutic interventions. Annette Rickel, a former president of SCRA, described the purpose of conference as “...to delineate the education of psychologists for a role in community mental health. She noted that training in community psychology would emphasize “education for prevention, provision for innovative field training experiences, and the need to create a knowledge base for community psychology through research and evaluation”<sup>7</sup>”

1966-APA develops Division of Community Psychology

1970-Formalized Community Psychology training programs begin

Ongoing development of the field to the present day

## Highlights

U.S. community psychology was founded at a conference in Swampscott, Massachusetts, 1965.

The conference spawned a new type of action-oriented psychology called Community Psychology.

Community Psychology became an innovative approach to research and practice, and quickly became a new field of study.

This field now includes a set of principles and practice competencies that have evolved to fit contemporary challenges.

<sup>1</sup> Tebes, J. K. (2016), Reflections on the Future of Community Psychology from the Generations after Swampscott: A Commentary and Introduction to the Special Issue. *Am J Community Psychol*, 58: 229–238. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12110

<sup>2</sup> Sarason, S.B. (1966). *Psychology in community settings: Clinical, educational, vocational, social aspects*. New York: Wiley.

<sup>3</sup> Fairweather, G.W. (1980). *The Fairweather lodge, a twenty-five year retrospective (No. 7)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

<sup>4</sup> Shure, M.B., & Spivack, G.(1978). *Problem-solving techniques in childrearing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Table 1. *Organizing Principles for Community Psychology Research and Practice*<sup>a</sup>

- 1) Considering individual vs. systems change, including first order vs. second order change
- 2) Understanding social ecological levels of analysis and intervention
- 3) Focusing on wellness, strengths, and competence (vs. deficits and disorder), including an emphasis on prevention, resilience, and health promotion
- 4) Valuing and promoting empowerment and social justice, including liberation from oppression
- 5) Understanding human diversity and cultural contexts
- 6) Advancing stakeholder participation, multi-level collaboration, and sense of community
- 7) Developing empirically-based models for action
- 8) Promoting theoretical and methodological pluralism

*Competencies for Community Psychology Practice*<sup>b</sup>

Foundational Principles	Ecological perspectives Empowerment Sociocultural and cross-cultural competence Community inclusion and partnership Ethical, reflective practice
Community Program Development and Management	Program development, implementation, and management Prevention and health promotion
Community and Organizational Capacity-Building	Community leadership and mentoring Small and large group processes Resource development Consultation and organizational development
Community and Social Change	Collaboration and coalition development Community development Community organizing and community advocacy Public policy analysis, development, and advocacy Community education, information dissemination, and building public awareness
Community Research	Participatory community research Program evaluation

<sup>a</sup> See: Kloos, Hill, Thomas, Wandersman, Elias, and Dalton (2012); Levine, Perkins, and Perkins (2005); Moritsugu, Wong, and Duffy (2010); Nelson and Prillettensky (2010); and Orford (2008).

<sup>b</sup> Competencies for community psychology practice. SCRA (2012). *The Community Psychologist*, 45, 8-14.

<sup>5</sup> Cowen, E.L., Trost, M.A., Izzo, L.D., Lorion, R.P., Dorr, D., & Isaacson, R.V.(1975). *New ways in school mental health: Early detection and prevention of school maladaptation*. New York: Human Sciences Press.

<sup>6</sup> Albee, G.W. (1959). *Mental health manpower trends*. Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health. Monograph Series No. 3, New York: Basic Books.

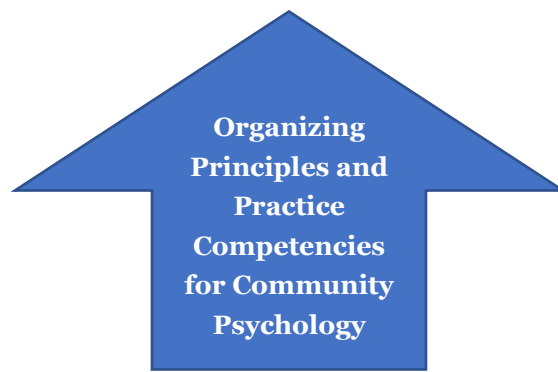
<sup>7</sup> Rickel, A.U. (1987). The 1965 Swampscott Conference and future topics for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15, 511–513.

## Why are There Various Definitions of Community Psychology?

Scholars, practitioners, and educators in community psychology regularly find themselves revisiting the field's definition as well as its mission, vision, and values. Re-imagining and re-envisioning the field and proposing new directions for it have become so common that at times it can seem that its adherents are engaged in an endless labyrinth of self-reflection.

*What is going on here? Do community psychologists not know who they are or what they stand for?*

To address this question, Tebes and colleagues provided organizing principles for the field that align with practice competencies developed by SCRA.<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 1. Scholars and practitioners gathered in Swampscott, Massachusetts. Their work provided a spark to what ultimately became the field of Community Psychology. [CCO Pixabay](#)*

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