10. Mullen Responds

Edward J. Mullen – Columbia University

Abstract

In this chapter I provide responses to comments made by the contributors to this volume. These authors have provided critical cross-national commentaries on contemporary issues that my past work has touched on. My responses are organized by key topics discussed by the authors. These issues pertain to evidence-based practice (EBP) including: (a) social work's journey toward EBP; (b) whether there is evidence of social work intervention effectiveness; (c) meanings of EBP across cultures; (d) what should be done when there is a shortage of evidence; (e) whether a conflict exists between practice research and EBP; (f) the gap between academic research and the needs of social work providers; and (g) social work expertise and the crisis of modernity. Prior to discussing these EBP topics, I comment on the role of mentorship in social work education.

10.1 Introduction

Haluk Soydan and the individual chapter authors are to be commended for undertaking this project, which is a critical examination of major developments in social work practice research spanning more than half a century (1962–2015). Each of the scholars contributing to this book has had a distinguished career in social work research and as a group they provide perspectives from a range of European countries and the United States. Their individual perspectives and philosophies are markedly different from one another and these chapters present a diversity of contemporary perspectives on social work research. Each author has considered an aspect of social work research found in one or more of my publications and related it to

contemporary developments, issues, and even controversies in their respective countries or regions.

I am most honored by the contributors for their essays addressing my work, especially their focus on the development of evidence-based practice (EBP). I express appreciation to Haluk Soydan for marshaling this project through from the beginning and for serving as editor. I am aware that the volume has not been conceptualized as a mere *festschrift*, but rather as a critical cross-national commentary on contemporary issues that in one way or another my past work has touched on and hopefully contributed to in some measure. Indeed, the chapters in this volume make important contributions to the literature in diverse ways.

I have organized my response by key topics discussed by the contributing authors. For the most part, these topics pertain to EBP. Prior to discussing EBP, however, I comment on the fundamentally important topic of mentorship in social work education.

10.2 Mentorship

Traube, Bellamy, and Bledsoe (2015) make a significant and fundamental contribution by calling attention to the importance of mentorship in shaping the next generation of social work scholars. Beyond their shining a light on the importance of mentorship in shaping future scholars, Traube, Bellamy, and Bledsoe provide an innovative conceptual framework and case examples in which they identify key elements of effective mentorship, drawing on the pragmatic controlled trial (PCT) framework of Glasgow and Steiner (2012). They write: "Although the PCT framework was designed to produce evidence for practice and policy decision making, this framework has elements that mirror the production of mentorship knowledge and successful mentees" (p. 114). As they note, the PCT framework is organized around seven elements: (a) practicality; (b) participation and representativeness; (c) realistic interventions; (d) attention to costs and resources; (e) respect for and

responsiveness to stakeholder-valued outcomes; (f) flexibility; and (g) transparency.

They further observe that "mentorship is an essential component of knowledge translation in academia, yet it is a challenging activity to execute with success and not often explicitly taught to aspiring social work scholars" (p. 114). Traube, Bellamy, and Bledsoe's call for attending to how mentorship should be conceptualized and cultivated in social work education is on target.

As Traube, Bellamy, and Bledsoe have so correctly stated, mentorship is an understudied and underappreciated aspect of social work education that can have significant and long-lasting effects on the future shape of social work practice and education.[1] Indeed, it is likely that many of the EBP implementation problems cited by contributors to this volume can be traced, at least partially, to how social work practitioners have been educated and mentored in social work educational programs.

10.3 Contemporary Issues Pertaining to Evidence-Based Policy and Practice

In my subsequent comments I address contemporary issues raised by contributors to this volume pertaining to EBP. These issues include: (a) social work's journey toward evidence-based practice; (b) whether there is evidence of social work intervention effectiveness; (c) meanings of EBP across cultures; (d) what should be done when there is a shortage of evidence; (e) whether a conflict exists between practice research and EBP; (f) the gap between academic research and the needs of social work providers; and (g) social work expertise and the crisis of modernity.

---

[1]   The importance of mentorship in social work education may be especially salient for racial and ethnic minorities. Mentorship was found to be one of two key strategies used in social work education to retain students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds (Mullen et al., 1993).

a. Social Work's Journey toward Evidence-Based Practice

Haluk Soydan (2015) paints a broad picture of social work practice research as represented in my publications. He provides an insightful and detailed description of social work's history pertaining to evaluation research examining intervention outcomes, which he correctly asserts ultimately led to the development of evidence-based practice. He is the first to describe parallels in the development of the foundations in evidence-based health care and evidence-based social work when he writes:

> In 1972, Edward Mullen, then a professor of social work at the University of Chicago, and James Dumpson published a book that to me served as a forerunner to evidence-based social work practice. The book, titled *Evaluation of Social Intervention*, is a collection of the contributions of 13 intervention studies presented at a national conference on the subject. … Archie Cochrane's pivotal book, *Effectiveness and Efficiency: Random Reflections on Health Services*, was also published in 1972 and the first Cochrane Center (in Oxford) was established in October 1992 (two decades after Cochrane's book). *Evidence-Based Medicine: How to Practice and Teach EBM*, the publication in which David Sackett, W. Scott Richardson, William Rosenberg, and R. Brian Haynes introduced the concept of evidence-based medicine as a process, was published in 1997. So perhaps social work was not so much behind medicine in observing the need to base its practices on strong scientific evidence. In fact, these were two contemporary, parallel, and emerging insights and ideas—each on one side of the Atlantic, unknown or not organically connected to each other—that would later be associated with medicine and social work. (p. 79)

Soydan makes the valuable observation that although EBP began as an outgrowth of concerns about intervention effectiveness in health care and social work, EBP has become a professional culture, an idea that he and Palinkas recently described (Soydan & Palinkas, 2014). Accordingly he writes: "Mullen and Dumpson's (1972) book and the Cochrane (1972) book would become beacons for the development of a new professional culture" (p. 81).

Soydan concludes his essay by highlighting recent efforts to reexamine and perhaps broaden the idea of evidence as used in social work EBP. This is timely and a call that is voiced by Mäntysaari, Lorenz, and other contributors to this volume. Like Mäntysaari and Lorenz, Soydan raises questions about how the idea of evidence has been conceptualized in social work EBP, with particular reference to systematic reviews such as those conducted by reviewers associated with the Cochrane and Campbell collaborations. He calls attention to the need to further develop the idea of evidence.

b. Is There Evidence of Social Work Intervention Effectiveness?

Soydan correctly observes that although early studies of social work intervention effectiveness were bleak, stunning progress has been made in the four subsequent decades as reported in recent publications such as that of Mullen and Shuluk (2011). He makes the important point that the generally reported positive outcomes of social work interventions provide evidence of both common and specific factors as causes of these impressive outcomes, citing Mullen, Shuluk, and Soydan (2011). This is an important observation because, as William Reid has noted, EBP's viability and utility is largely dependent on the assumption that alternative interventions with demonstrated specific effects are available for use by practitioners (Reid, Kenaley, & Colvin, 2004).

Nevertheless, some scholars continue to interpret the available evidence as suggesting that social work interventions are effective due largely, if not solely, to common relationship factors. For example, Otto, Polutta, and Ziegler (2009) stated that when it comes to the question of what works in social work, the evidence indicates that outcomes are explained by relationship characteristics such as alliance and emotional involvement of the client rather than programs or technologies (see p. 246, footnote 2). This view is shared by other European social work scholars such as Bergmark and Lundström, who have drawn inferences about social work effectiveness from psychotherapy research. Bergmark and Lundström (2011) argued that the evidence

concerning psychotherapy outcomes indicates that such outcomes are largely due to common factors such as relationship qualities.

I have addressed this question elsewhere and shown that this is a misreading of the current evidence about what accounts for social work intervention outcomes (Mullen, 2014). This misreading is based on a logical error involving mixing levels of discourse. Although some social workers engage in psychotherapy, many do not. From a global perspective, it seems fair to say that most social work practitioners provide some form of service other than psychotherapy at the direct service level, and many engage in group, community, administrative, and policy practice. Accordingly, social work is not reducible to psychotherapy, so it is not logically appropriate to take evidence about psychotherapy outcomes and apply it to the broad scope of social work practice.

In addition to this logical error, there also has been a misreading of the available evidence regarding psychotherapy outcomes. My reading of the evidence along with the conclusions of Soydan and Shuluk indicate that both social work interventions and psychotherapy interventions often have specific effects beyond those that may be due to common relationship factors (Mullen, 2014; Mullen et al., 2011).

c. Meanings of EBP across Cultures

Because the contributors to this volume are citizens of many countries, a reading of their respective contributions provides an interesting set of contrasts about how EBP is defined, viewed, and implemented from a cross-national perspective. Karen Tengvald (2015) describes the development of EBP in Sweden and Mikko Mäntysaari (2015) comments on the Finnish context (discussed subsequently). Inge Bryderup (2015) describes how EBP ideas have influenced Danish social policy and social work research, with special attention to the trade union for Danish social pedagogues and practitioners. She presents a vivid description of how various constituencies understand and define evidence-based practice and research. She concludes

that EBP has not had a significant impact on social work practice and research in Denmark, and furthermore it has sparked a debate in the Danish social pedagogue community that seems to concern the heart of that profession's identity in Danish society.

> Thus, the debate between the trade union [for social pedagogues] and the practitioners can be seen as a struggle to define the social pedagogical profession and the extent to which evidence-based practice should be used in relation to social pedagogical practice. Evidence-based practice is understood as intrusive, whereas knowledge in a broader sense is seen as more appropriate for the development of social pedagogical work. There is also more indirect talk about resistance against the evidence hierarchy of knowledge as a strategy to research outcomes and the effects of interventions. (pp. 41–42)

These concerns about the impact of EBP on professional identity and the emphasis on quantitative methods and hierarchical views of evidence as contrasted with qualitative approaches to knowledge are of concern to several of the contributors to this volume, notably Mikko Mäntysaari and Walter Lorenz—concerns that I subsequently address.

It is noteworthy that EBP in Denmark as described by Bryderup is equated with evidence-based programs rather than the process of evidence-based decision making. I wonder how Danish social pedagogues and other relevant constituencies would respond if the emphasis were to be placed on viewing EBP as a decision-making process as described by Bruce Thyer in this volume, which I comment on next.

In contrast to how EBP has been defined and viewed in Denmark (as described by Bryderup) Bruce Thyer (2015) presents a comprehensive description of EBP as applied to social work in the United States. His chapter should be carefully studied by individuals wishing to understand what is meant by EBP and those who are skeptics. Frequently encountered criticisms of EBP are that it is mechanistic and overly prescriptive; depreciates practitioner expertise and relationship factors; ignores client values and

preferences; promotes a cookbook approach to social work practice; is basically a cost-cutting tool; and is an ivory tower concept of little practice value (Mullen & Streiner, 2004; Straus & McAlister, 2000). A reading of Thyer's description of EBP shows how these criticisms of EBP result from misunderstandings.

As Bryderup's (2015) description of EBP in Denmark illustrates, EBP as a process is often equated with specific interventions that have been validated through research (e.g., evidence-based practices, evidence-based programs, evidence-based interventions, research-supported or tested treatments, empirically or research-informed or tested interventions, best practices, practice guidelines) and that are typically carefully designed and empirically validated manualized interventions developed for use with specific populations and specific types of problems. Thyer takes exception to this view, arguing that EBP and research-supported treatments are not equivalent, writing: "EBP does not consist of simply locating research-supported treatments and deciding to apply them to a client. Indeed, this approach is completely antithetical to the original and continuing model of EBP" (p. 101). This is a view I strongly endorse.

In Thyer's view, EBP is not mechanistic and prescriptive but rather rests on practitioner expertise including judgement and relationship skills that enable informed choices among alternatives, taking into account not only research evidence but client values and preferences, resources, and in situ contexts. It is far from a cookbook approach to social work practice because it involves consideration of a great deal of information and many subjective factors specific to each client's situation. EBP is a complex process focused on the client's best interest and as such is hardly a cost-cutting tool. As described by Thyer, EBP is practical and responsive to the needs of everyday practice. I find Thyer's view of EBP most congenial and consistent with my own perspective.

d. What should be Done when there is a Shortage of Evidence?

An additional criticism of EBP is that it leads to nihilism in the absence of evidence from randomized trials. Mikko Mäntysaari (2015) identifies this criticism as an issue and therefore a limitation of EBP. He observes that strong evidence often is not available to guide practitioners as they seek to provide services to their clients. Mäntysaari, writing from his experiences in Finland, examines the question of how to maintain a research-based orientation when evidence of the effectiveness of intervention options is weak or altogether absent, as in the case in his assessment of services provided to Finnish victims of domestic violence. This shortage of evidence can be due to the lack of findings from high-quality studies; the absence of a sufficient number of relevant high-quality studies; or the availability of high-quality studies that are not culturally or demographically relevant. He states that in such circumstances an ethical dilemma is created because social workers must provide services even in the absence of convincing evidence that those services are effective.

This is a concern that is frequently raised about EBP and one that, as Mäntysaari notes, we have examined previously:

> EBP, as the term implies, is predicated on the belief that what we do as professionals should be based on the best available evidence. Generally, the best evidence [concerning the effectiveness of social work interventions] comes from well-designed and -executed randomized controlled trials (RCTs) or, better yet, meta-analyses of a number of RCTs (Egger, Smith, & O'Rourke, 2001). … The question that faces proponents of EBP is whether there are enough high-quality studies so that evidence-based decisions can be made. … [In fact, studies have shown] there are still many decisions that are made that are not based on good evidence. (Mullen & Streiner, 2004, pp. 114–115)

Thyer (2015) addresses this issue when he writes:

> Contrary to common misconceptions, the ability to undertake EBP does not depend on the existence of a large body of randomized experimental outcome studies in the client's problem area. On the contrary, EBP seeks out all credible sources of useful information, which of course includes randomized controlled trials (RCTs) if available, but also high-quality quasi-experiments, preexperiments, correlational research, qualitative studies (see Saini & Crath, 2015), expert opinions, and relevant theory. If recent high-quality meta-analyses or systematic reviews are available, these are often given preferential status because of their ability to better control for bias in conclusions. However there is always evidence that a practitioner can critically review, hence the process of carrying out EBP is always possible, even if the evidence is of low quality. (p. 102)

Mäntysaari calls for a reexamination of the idea of evidence so as to address this ethical and practical concern (Lorenz also reinforces this point in his chapter). Mäntysaari questions the relevance to social work of limiting the meaning of high-quality evidence to findings derived from RCTs and suggests that other types of evidence should be considered, including what Max Weber referred to as *verstehen*. He writes:

> In social work there is always an interplay between rational, goal-oriented action (in Weberian terms, *Zweckrationale Handlung*) and emotional understanding, which can also generate evidential knowledge, although it is much more difficult to generalize and describe to others. The key word for Weber is *verstehen*, or understanding the meaning of action, and this is needed even when we use rational inference to determine whether some piece of research knowledge can be considered as evidence. (p. 74)

Drawing on Weber's views, Mäntysaari concludes with a thought-provoking observation that represents his answer to the ethical dilemma identified at the outset of his chapter.

> I think that many of the actions of professional social workers are based on an understanding of the meaning of social actions, which is the only way to act in

response to Chancen in the Weberian sense of the term—to act socially is to follow up on leads and hints that make it possible to understand social actions.

If Weber's idea about social action is valid, there may never be enough evidence to support airtight decision making about care. The professional cannot avoid taking chances. Evidence-based practice can never guarantee certainty, but it can limit the amount of uncertainty. (p. 75)

Lorenz addresses this idea in his chapter as well, which I discuss subsequently. I am in basic agreement with Mäntysaari's (and Lorenz's) position that the concept of evidence in the context of social work effectiveness questions needs to be reexamined. His critical analysis as well as Lorenz's is a contribution to that dialogue. In addition, their emphases on the uncertainties of EBP decision making are critical observations. Individuals seeking certainty when making social work intervention decisions will not find that certainty in EBP, for as Mäntysaari concludes, EBP can be considered a rational process for making decisions in the face of uncertainties, in situations wherein certainty is not attainable. And as he concludes, EBP can never guarantee certainty but it can limit the amount of uncertainty.

e. Practice Research and EBP: Is there a Conflict?

Mike Fisher and Peter Marsh (2015) note that my work has focused primarily on social work practice research and that in that context I have championed the importance of practitioner–researcher collaboration, as well as the notion that such research should be relevant to the needs of agency-based practitioners.

Their observations caused me to reflect on how I came to this position. I can now trace the origins of this emphasis to my exposure to mentors during my doctoral studies at Columbia University in New York. At the time (1964), it was widely believed that social work faculty members and researchers should be experienced social work practitioners. It was held that only experienced practitioners could be sufficiently familiar with the realities and nuances of practice so as to have the sensitivity and insight needed to conduct relevant

research and teach social work practice. Accordingly, with few exceptions, social work doctoral programs only admitted students who had completed a master's degree in social work and had a minimum of three years of supervised practice experience. Furthermore, it was held by many individuals that practice researchers and teachers of social work practice should continue to practice social work so as to stay relevant in their research and teaching. This view of practice research was clearly reflected in the most influential social work practice textbook at that time:

> Casework today has two great needs. One is for the development of greater skill among practitioners in using all that is already well established in casework theory. … The other is for research into problems of casework practice, carried on by investigators who are skilled in research methodology, grounded in casework content, theory and practice, and thoroughly cognizant of the nature of the problems and treatment methods they seek to study. … If the art of casework is to be passed on in schools of social work course content must be the product of seasoned, first-hand knowledge … teachers must find ways to continue to engage in casework practice. (Hollis, 1964, pp. 269–270)

This view no longer seems to hold sway in American schools of social work, and an increasing number of doctoral program graduates, researchers, and faculty members no longer have a lengthy amount of practice experience nor do they typically continue to engage in practice. Rather, given the demands emanating from practice, research, and faculty roles, it is now common to abandon this all-in-one expectation and look to other ways that practice research and practice teaching can be relevant and grounded in the realities and requirements of practice, such as through collaborations and partnerships between practitioners and researchers and through university and social agency collaborative efforts.

Fisher and Marsh (2015) describe current work in this area and provide a clear example of one such effort to build research from practice, family group conferences, in which "the research has originated in practice innovation (rather than arising from researchers), a process characterized as enquiring

social work practice"(p. 47). Their chapter is an exemplar of forward thinking regarding how practice and research collaboration can be achieved given contemporary conditions.

Fisher and Marsh raise a troubling issue about how some EBP advocates appear to "remain unconvinced of the need to engage directly with practice to develop knowledge" (p. 47). They state: "In particular, these advocates misrepresent the work because they fail to understand the model [i.e., enquiring social work practice], what makes it work, and why it matters" (p. 47). They call for research that emanates from practice and that engages practitioners, clients, and researchers in the formulation and conduct of research and the use of findings. This strikes me as a most sensible suggestion and one that I have long advocated.

Fisher and Marsh correctly identify a potential conflict between some versions of EBP and the vision of practice research that they put forth. I believe this potential conflict can be avoided by separating EBP as a process from the issue of how research for use in that process is generated. As described by Thyer (2015), EBP should be conceptualized as an umbrella framework that is designed to facilitate collaborative decision making involving, first and foremost, clients together with informed practitioners and that takes into account not only the best available research evidence but also client preferences, values, and circumstances and available resources, constraints, and organizational contexts. In this form of EBP, practitioner expertise and experience are considered valuable resources made available to the client system. I see no conflict with the vision of practice research put forth by Fisher and Marsh and this conceptualization of EBP as a collaborative decision-making process.

I see their concerns as more relevant to the way in which research for practice is generated. Whatever process is used to generate and disseminate practice research findings for use in EBP, that process must ensure not only validity of findings but also relevance for use in practice decision making. As Fisher and Marsh note, as do Tengvald and others in this volume, research that is not

practice relevant will be of little help to clients and practitioners engaged in the process of EBP.

f. Gap between Academic Research and Needs of Social Work Providers

Karin Tengvald (2015) makes a significant contribution to this volume by describing the Swedish context and identifying a key issue, namely the gap that sometimes occurs between the academy and the needs of social work providers. Tengvald notes that just as in the United States, Sweden also experienced a period beginning in the 1970s during which critical concern was raised about the effectiveness of Swedish social work practice and the shortage of scientifically validated knowledge needed to support Swedish social services. She notes that in 1982 this led to "a profound modernization of the social services legislation" (p. 94) and a call for increased research and evaluation.

Tengvald further reports that in the mid-1990s, under the pressure of cost-effectiveness requirements, concern again was raised about the lack of information about the outcomes of social work services. The Swedish Centre for Evaluation of Social Services and its successor, the Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work Practice, both affiliated with the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), responded to this call by becoming major producers of needs-based social work research and evaluation so now Tengvald (2015) is able to report that "the situation is slowly changing. Relevant research is gradually expanding and social services managers are showing increasing interest in implementing evidence-based practice and interventions (Socialstyrelsen, 2013)" (p. 96).

Tengvald reports that these concerns also led to the expansion of social work education programs at all Swedish universities. However, Tengvald sees a significant gap between the needs of social work managers and practitioners for knowledge about effective social work practices and the orientation of social work educational programs, which she reports have little interest in research that would address these needs—that is, applied, needs-based

research of direct relevance to social work practice—and are especially uninterested in quantitative, outcomes-oriented evaluation research. For the most part, Tengvald states, it seems that these social work programs are not interested in educating their students to appreciate or be prepared to engage in practices that are evidence based. She writes:

> It is therefore not surprising that the peer reviewers responsible for the latest national evaluation of all Swedish social work bachelor's and master's programs straightforwardly concluded that social work training programs did not contain teaching and training based on concepts that integrate scientific knowledge and social work practice, e.g., evidence-based practice (Högskoleverket, 2009). (p. 96)

If this is true, serious concerns for the future of effective and relevant social work practice in Sweden must be raised. It would seem that there is a major challenge ahead for Swedish social work education and practice, namely, if practice-relevant, needs-based research and outcomes-oriented evaluation research are not to be conducted in the universities and students are not to be trained in these methods by their instructors and mentors, then how will such knowledge be generated?

Sweden has a history of conducting social work research through the Swedish Centre for Evaluation of Social Services and the Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work Practice. Now that these social work research entities no longer exist, a gap appears to have developed between the knowledge needs of practitioners in municipalities and how those needs will be met. Furthermore, although there are impressive efforts to conduct systematic reviews of outcome studies pertaining to social work in Sweden (and in Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom), much of the outcomes research included in those reviews has been conducted in other countries with different forms of service systems and different cultures. Accordingly, there is a need for research that examines the relevance of this research to the Swedish context and for additional research to focus on the unique problems faced by Swedish social workers.

Although Tengvald describes the Swedish context, in my view several other European countries share similar circumstances pertaining to the gap between social work educational programs and provider needs. This gap is reflective of differing academic views about the value and relevance of EBP, the function of social work in society, the relationship between the academy and service providers, and national policies pertaining to EBP and resource allocation.

g. Social Work Expertise and the Crisis of Modernity

Walter Lorenz's (2015) essay critically examines the broad political, cultural, historical, and social context in which the social work profession's consideration of EBP must be embedded. He presents an insightful analysis of how the crisis of modernity has shaped contemporary social work, observing:

> Social work as a product of modernity shares in the fundamental ambiguity of the principles that gave rise to the development of modern societies: the emphasis on individual autonomy and freedom as a means of breaking free from imposed obligations and constraints on one hand and the demand for universal equality in recognition of the mutual dependence in organic solidarity on the other. (p. 9)

Lorenz warns that:

> In the current political climate, resonating in popular culture, which privileges individual autonomy over principles of equality, the social work profession is in danger of becoming polarized between a predominance of control functions in interventions concerning the public sphere and the relegation of care functions to the private sphere. (p. 9)

Lorenz relates this polarization to EBP when he writes:

> This split is also affecting the production of knowledge for social work practice, in which on one hand positivist approaches to research are receiving heightened attention and seek to satisfy the demand for the achievement of predetermined goals of intervention within the framework of evidence-based practice, whereas on the other expert systems are being challenged by the articulation of knowledge

based primarily on direct experience and hence expressed in self-help and user-led approaches to services. (p. 9)

Lorenz proposes that this polarization, emanating from the crisis of modernity, must be addressed "to allow social work to return to its essential mandate under current political and cultural conditions, which is to contribute to the existence of social conditions of human existence in modernity" (pp. 9–10).

Previously, Lorenz (2007) cautioned the profession when he observed that European social work is now in its third wave as it moves toward adopting functionalist EBP:

> The third wave is currently reaching most countries with established social service structures. It occurs in the context of responses to the so-called crisis of the welfare state, the alleged unsustainability of those very achievements of the postwar consensus which had secured economic success and social stability in western Europe. It draws social workers into the ambit of neoliberal social policies which are concerned with creating market-like conditions in public service areas and organizing services according to standards of cost-effectiveness. Here the ahistorical emphasis on activating clients to construct their own life projects … is aided by an objectifying, quantifying view of social problems that can then be resolved with managerial procedures. The benchmark criteria according to which clients are being given standardized services are frequently derived from functionalist notions of evidence-based practice and make scant reference to cultural values and historical continuities (Parton, 2004; Trinder and Reynolds, 2000; Webb, 2001). (pp. 606–607)

In Europe, this functionalist view of EBP is seen as raising issues about managerialism, quantification of social problems, and standardization of practice. Lorenz (2007) stated the need for caution.

> At this point, when we witness the advance of management and coaching models in social work, more than our professional identity and standing is at stake. Withdrawal to a position of value neutrality, to technical detachment, has to be regarded with extreme caution in the light of the misuse once made of social work

in the period of national socialism in Germany (Lorenz, 1994; Sunker and Otto, 1997). (pp. 600–601)

Europe's history with totalitarian regimes has left many Europeans with skepticism about any social work proposal that smacks of authoritarianism. Lorenz (2007), citing Fukuyama's thesis of the end of history, expressed such skepticism.

> If the end of history means the victory of a particular way of thinking that eliminates opposition, then the consequences for us today are indeed precarious. This corresponds precisely to the point where many practising social workers experience a sense of powerlessness when faced with prescribed intervention scenarios in which the actual frame of reference leaves no alternatives: economic conditions have to be respected, management criteria prevail, efficiency targets are absolute, procedures have to be adhered to, risks have to be eliminated. At the end of this agenda lies not the perfect society but the totalitarian society. (p. 602)

Given this historical context, I am quite aware that many scholars in Europe seem to reject evidence-based practice outright and see it as fundamentally at odds with social work's mission. Lorenz (2007) wrote:

> Wiping out the historical frame within which a form of social work takes place capable of engaging with issues of identity and culture would mean wiping out the possibility of understanding clients as persons in a hermeneutic sense. It would make social work clinical and functional as a means of turning people into objects through the helping process and losing essential parts of their personhood. This is why the current language of management and efficiency, the preoccupation with rules and procedures, the advance of a positivist evidence-based practice model and the focus on risk reduction are all threats to the central mandate of social work which is not to repair situations of need and deficit but to accompany and assist people in coping with their lives appropriately and competently (Ferguson, 2003). (p. 610)

I believe that these worries about positivist and technologically driven evidence-based practice being a threat to social work's central mandate may

well be based on a view of EBP that most of EBP's contemporary social work advocates would not endorse. Indeed, Lorenz concludes his essay in this volume with a conceptualization of EBP that is largely congruent with more recent descriptions of social work EBP. Commenting on my description of EBP evidence dimensions, Lorenz (2015) writes:

> All these dimensions [EBP evidence domains] are held together by ethical considerations that subject criteria of effectiveness to a critical examination of the wider implications of interventions, which might adversely impinge on the dignity of individuals and their rights. The end must never justify the means—a fascination with technical means of achieving results in modernity has all too often led to … people being treated against their will and their best interest. (p. 27)

I am in agreement with Urban Nothdurfter and Lorenz's (2010) view that the EBP conflict as it is being played out in Europe must be faced and dealt with dialectically. Nothdurfter and Lorenz (2010) suggested that the issues raised by the evidence-based practice philosophy pose a dilemma for the profession.

> As one can recognize easily, there is a fundamental contraposition in the debate about what might be a valid base for good and accountable practice, mainly between those who promote approaches of evidence based practice and those who criticize them. The argument sustained here in this regard is rather simple, namely that this conflict cannot be resolved or overcome, but that social work has to face it and to deal with it dialectically. (p. 47)

I am in further agreement with Lorenz's optimistic concluding observation when he writes: "The debate on evidence in social work is an opportunity to affirm this profession's ethical commitment, professional competence, and critical political competence" (p. 27).

10.4 Coda

The European contributors to this volume have uniformly identified significant issues pertaining to the acceptance and implementation of EBP in their respective countries. Because EBP in social work has now been considered and debated in much of the English-speaking world and in many European countries since the turn of the century, the striking variance across countries in acceptance and implementation requires an explanation. It strikes me that there are two major explanatory drivers that facilitate or impede acceptance and implementation across countries. I believe it reasonable to assert that the two key determinants of the form social work practice will take in the future are: (a) the vision, values, knowledge, and skills imparted to students through faculty instruction and mentorship; and (b) macro-level public sector policies that largely determine the character of the organizations and social service systems employing social work practitioners. In the case of EBP, graduates of social work educational programs that prepare their students to be evidence-based practitioners by providing training in the development of critical reasoning and research assessment skills through instruction and mentorship, when employed by organizations and service systems that have been incentivized by public policies to be providers of evidence-based services, will likely implement evidence-based practice and research-tested interventions. Conversely, graduates of educational programs that reject or ignore the teaching of EBP in instruction and especially in mentorship or who are subsequently employed by organizations or service systems not exposed to public policies that incentivize and provide resources for EBP are not likely to provide evidence-based services to their clients. Increasingly, these two facilitators are becoming more common in some countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. It seems that in many European countries, the second condition is increasingly present, namely macro-level public sector policies that incentivize or at least encourage EBP, whereas the first condition is largely absent, namely instruction and mentoring in EBP in European schools of social work. Without strong and consistent support among academic social workers, it is likely that EBP will face an uncertain future in European social work practice.

References

Bergmark, A., & Lundström, T. (2011). Socialstyrelsen, dronten och den evidensbaserade praktiken. *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, *3*, 244–250.

Bryderup, I. M. (2015). Reflections on the impact of the evidence-based practice approach in Denmark on politics, research, the trade union, and social work practice. In H. Soydan (Ed.), *Social work practice to the benefit of our clients: Scholarly legacy of Edward J. Mullen* (pp. 31–46). Bolzano, Italy: Bozen-Bolzano University Press.

Fisher, M., & Marsh, P. (2015). The research–practice relationship and the work of Edward J. Mullen. In H. Soydan (Ed.), *Social work practice to the benefit of our clients: Scholarly legacy of Edward J. Mullen* (pp. 47–63). Bolzano, Italy: Bozen-Bolzano University Press.

Glasgow, R. E., & Steiner, J. F. (2012). Comparative effectiveness research to accelerate translation: Recommendations for an emerging field of science. In R. C. Brownson, G. A. Colditz, & E. K. Proctor (Eds.), *Dissemination and implementation research in health: Translating science to practice* (pp. 72–93). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hollis, F. (1964). *Casework: A psychosocial therapy*. New York, NY: Random House.

Lorenz, W. (2007). Practising history: Memory and contemporary professional practice. *International Social Work*, *50*, 597–612. doi:10.1177/0020872807079918

Lorenz, W. (2015). Social work expertise and the crisis of modernity. In H. Soydan (Ed.), *Social work practice to the benefit of our clients: Scholarly legacy of Edward J. Mullen* (pp. 9–30). Bolzano, Italy: Bozen-Bolzano University Press.

Mäntysaari, M. (2015). Evidence-based practice and domestic violence. In H. Soydan (Ed.), *Social work practice to the benefit of our clients: Scholarly legacy of Edward J. Mullen* (pp. 56–77). Bozen-Bolzano, Italy: Bozen-Bolzano University Press.

Mullen, E. J. (2014). Evidence-based knowledge in the context of social practice. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, *42*(13, Suppl.), 59–73. doi:10.1177/1403494813516714

Mullen, E. J., Combre, J. W., Mattaini, M. A., Corwin, M., Gatenio, S., Castanuela, M., & Salas, S. (1993). *Focus on minority recruitment and retention in graduate social work education*. New York, NY: Columbia University, School of Social Work.

Mullen, E. J., & Shuluk, J. (2011). Outcomes of social work intervention in the context of evidence-based practice. *Journal of Social Work*, *11*, 49–63. doi:10.1177/1468017310381309

Mullen, E. J., Shuluk, J., & Soydan, H. (2011). *Debatten om Dodo-fågeln: Spelar behandlingsmetoden någon roll i klientarbete?* [The dodo-bird debate: Does treatment method play no role in client work?] Stockholm, Sweden: Socialstyrelsen.

Mullen, E. J., & Streiner, D. L. (2004). The evidence for and against evidence-based practice. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention*, *4*, 111–121. doi:10.1093/brief-treatment/mhh009

Nothdurfter, U., & Lorenz, W. (2010). Beyond the pro and contra of evidence-based practice: Reflections on a recurring dilemma at the core of social work. *Social Work and Society*, *8*, 46–59.

Otto, H.-U., Polutta, A., & Ziegler, H. (2009). Reflexive professionalism as a second generation of evidence-based practice: Some considerations on the special issue "What works? Modernizing the knowledge-base of social work." *Research on Social Work Practice*, *19*, 472–478. doi:10.1177/ 1049731509333200

Reid, W. J., Kenaley, B. D., & Colvin, J. (2004). Do some interventions work better than others? A review of comparative social work experiments. *Social Work Research*, *28*, 71–81. doi:10.1093/swr/28.2.71

Soydan, H. (2015). Evaluation of social work intervention: An early prelude to evidence-based social work practice. In H. Soydan (Ed.), *Social work practice to the benefit of our clients: Scholarly legacy of Edward J. Mullen* (pp. 79–91). Bolzano, Italy: Bozen-Bolzano University Press.

Soydan, H., & Palinkas, L. A. (2014). *Evidence-based practice in social work: Development of a new professional culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Straus, S. E., & McAlister, F. A. (2000). Evidence-based medicine: A commentary on common criticisms. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, *163*, 837–841.

Tengvald, K. (2015). Edward J. Mullen's contribution: A Swedish and a personal perspective. In H. Soydan (Ed.), *Social work practice to the benefit of our clients: Scholarly legacy of Edward J. Mullen* (pp. 93–100). Bozen-Bolzano, Italy: Bozen-Bolzano University Press.

Thyer, B. A. (2015). Edward J. Mullen and the promotion of research on social work practice. In H. Soydan (Ed.), *Social work practice to the benefit of our clients: Scholarly legacy of Edward J. Mullen* (pp. 101–112). Bozen-Bolzano, Italy: Bozen-Bolzano University Press.

Traube, D. E., Bellamy, J. L., & Bledsoe, S. E. (2015). Advancing social work research through doctoral education and mentorship. In H. Soydan (Ed.), *Social work practice to the benefit of our clients: Scholarly legacy of Edward J. Mullen (*pp. 113–122). Bolzano, Italy: Bozen-Bolzano University Press.