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**ABSTRACT**

Social work, ideologically speaking, is a profession grounded in principles of integration and interaction. The principles are embedded in curriculum policies for accreditation. They span interdisciplinary information, person and environment, research and practice, practice and policy, and theory and practice. The values, knowledge, and skills integration that is proposed may not be successfully implemented for three reasons. Two reasons are specific to social work: the impossibility of carrying out all of the activities expected of social work educators and the fact the social work professionals are conflicted concerning their commitment to integration at all levels and fields of practice. Integration is not really respected or rewarded in either practice or academic arenas. Research reveals that integration is unlikely for any profession in the absence of an integrative structure. The establishment of a national social work linkage service is proposed. The service could focus on the integration of research, policy, and practice while including several areas of integrative concern. Such a service could provide the missing link that has kept social work from realizing its integrative purpose and identity, establishing social work as a visibly authentic profession. (Author/NB)

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Forging the Missing Link in Social Work:  
A Proposal to Establish a National Social Work Linkage Service

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Abstract

*Tanice Wood Wetzel*

Forging the Missing Link in Social Work:  
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Social Work, ideologically speaking, is a profession grounded in principles of integration and interaction. The principles are imbedded in our curriculum policies for accreditation. They span interdisciplinary information, person and environment, research and practice, practice and policy, theory and practice, to name just a few of the relevant areas. The writer suggests that we do not successfully implement the values, knowledge and skills integration that we propose for two reasons specific to social work and another that crosses all professions. The first is the impossibility of carrying out all of the activities expected of social work educators. The second reason is that social work professionals are conflicted concerning our commitment to integration at all levels and fields of practice. Integration, it is proposed, is not really respected or rewarded in either practice or academic arenas. Further, research reveals that integration is unlikely for any profession in the absence of an integrative structure. The establishment of a national social work linkage service is proposed. The staffing, programming, and necessary qualities of linkage systems are presented. While focussing on the integration of research, policy and practice, the writer suggests that many areas of integrative concern also should be included. Such a service could provide the missing link that has kept social work from realizing its integrative purpose and identity, establishing social work as a visibly authentic profession.

Forging the Missing Link in Social Work:  
A Proposal to Establish a National Social Work Linkage Service

Janice Wood Wetzel

Edna St. Vincent Millay poetically posed the dilemma years ago:

Upon this gifted age, In its dark hour,  
Rains from the sky a meteoric shower  
Of facts. . .they lie unquestioned, uncombined  
Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill  
Is dally spun, but there exists no loom  
To weave it into fabric.

Sonnet 137

Social work could provide that loom. Social work should provide that loom.

Social Work's Mandate

Social work, ideologically speaking, is a profession grounded in principles of integration and interaction. The principles are imbedded in our curriculum policies for accreditation, in our unified values, professional knowledge and skills. We are expected to "transfer" our commonly shared qualities "from one setting, population group, geographic area or problem to another."<sup>1</sup> "The goal of social work education at every level", so mandates our profession, "is for students to integrate values, knowledge, and skills of the profession into competent practice."<sup>2</sup> We have embraced a person-in-environment ideology about the development of people across the lifespan, and the reciprocal impact on them as members of families, groups, and communities. In this era of international

consciousness, relevant knowledge must even encompass the globe. We must not overlook the consequences and diversity of ethnicity, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, class, gender, sexual orientation/affectual preference, and other aspects of culture in a pluralistic society. Attention may be given, for example, to the status of disabled veterans or veterans of the Vietnam Era, physical or mental disability, criminal records, or records of impairment, including mental retardation.<sup>3</sup> Further, we are reminded that we are an interdisciplinary profession, integrating biological, social, psychological, as well as cultural systems; many even include spiritual dimensions. The list goes on. . .

Scientific knowledge must be integrated into social welfare policy and services, and students are instructed in the analysis of the justness or injustice of social and economic policies. Multiple methods and models of practice ranging from generalist to substantive specializations must integrate the most up-to-date research-based knowledge. And research content must relate to practice in an explicit way. Field practice, too often relegated to second class status, should be an integral, respected part of the curriculum. We must heal the split between BSW and MSW curricula, and between MSW and doctoral levels, and we must bridge the gaps between academic research and the "real world" of practice.

The mandate is as overwhelming as it is clear. But it is not new. We have individually and collectively extolled the virtues of person-in-environment interaction and research-practice and policy integration since the days of the Pittsburgh Survey<sup>4</sup> and Mary Richmond.<sup>5</sup> Leaders in our field for decades have continued to keep the tasks of integration and interaction

before us.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, the social work literature has addressed the problem in terms of the dissemination and utilization of research.

Discussions range between practice based conceptual framework development,<sup>7</sup> evaluative research utilization,<sup>8</sup> and issues related to quantitative methodologies versus qualitative research.<sup>9</sup> Still, if truth be known, we make little headway in our individual classes and institutions, much less the practice and policy communities.

There are, it appears, missing links in our ideological chains connecting our many areas of concern and interest. There is a link missing at the interface of the person and environment. Despite the fact that we have become aware of populations-at-risk, for example, we continue to view them as peripheral to theory, to practice, to policy and to research. There is a missing link between psychological theories and their direct translation to clinical practice. There is a link missing between research and practice, despite exhortations for applied knowledge. There is a link missing between practice and policy, however insightful we may be regarding relevance of the personal to the political. For people of color, links are missing to all of these arenas, despite our consciousness of the tentativeness of our knowledge and the diversity of human experience. And how many social work classes focus on women, the population with whom social workers are most likely to be concerned, addressing the two-way impact of practice and policy? Indeed, our theories generally ignore the gender issues that have been researched for a century. The facts concerning women throughout the world have remained consistently true for generations (second class status, and the highest risk for poverty, abuse and

depression, for example). Yet, women across all cultures continue to be relegated just as consistently to marginal, special issue categories.<sup>10</sup>

We are members of the profession who consider ourselves to be facilitators of growth and well-being, advocates of the poor and the disenfranchised. Yet we often remain virtually invisible to the community. . . or visibly ineffectual. There is a link missing between ideology and actuality. I suggest that authenticity is our missing link, a collective absence of identity. We can forge that link with a realistic appraisal and re-vision of both our attitudes and methods for realizing our objectives. This paper will discuss the underlying integrative constraints that exist in the worlds of the social work educator/researcher and practitioner/researcher alike. A case will be made for a national social work linkage service which would span both worlds. The proposed service could encompass the integration of many other disconnected arenas as well, establishing a unified professional identity.

### The Missing Link

The problem of the missing link is based on both pragmatic limitations and the existence of a Janus-like professional persona. While there may be political reasons for the dearth of applied social work knowledge and the successful linkage of our stated purposes, there are practical underpinnings. Educators are given the mandate to integrate all arenas, in turn studying, teaching, researching, writing, publishing, public speaking, practicing, consulting, advising, grant writing, organizing, programming, and administering. (Anyone for tap dancing?) The task is formidable and unrealistic for anyone, much less anyone who wants to preserve a private life as well. By accepting the fantasy, we court disillusionment, inherent

guilt, and a collectively undeserved reputation for scholarly ineffectiveness. We must take time to redesign our profession, based on our own high standards and sound values, setting our own rules, boundaries, objectives and goals. We cannot each be all things to all people. But as a team, we can fulfill our mission if we take a hard look at our incongruities and commit ourselves to a realistic plan of action.

Despite our high sounding purposes, I submit that we as a profession are conflicted concerning our commitment to integration at all levels and in all fields of practice. The fact is that integration is not respected because we often don't honor one another's territory. In academia, many give lip service to integration while subtly treating the clinical arena and applied research as second class. Educators know what "it's only a workshop" means, even when that workshop is based upon sound research. Few have earned tenure for applying knowledge to practice in the community.

The clinical arena has its own style of creating barriers to integration. "It's only academic" has long been a cliché, and research often is declared to be "Ivory Tower"--unrelated to the "real world," irrelevant or inappropriate to practice. Even when these obstacles are overcome, relevance does not insure integration. Applied research is likely to be viewed as inferior "how to" information, not to be confused with sound, sophisticated theory and professional practice wisdom.

While reasons for our disparities may be political, they are also practical. It may be naive, for instance, to think that the presentation of facts regarding women or people of color, or elderly, or children will lead logically to inclusion of content, to intervention and social change. Perhaps we cannot expect all social work educators, researchers, clinicians, and policy analysts to maintain an interdisciplinary perspective while

holding to social values, to integrate information, and to create linkages between populations-at-risk, knowledge, practice and policy. We are asking social workers to do what they are seldom really educated to do despite our sincere professional intent. The task is unwieldy, and there is little time to complete it, given burgeoning expectations in the academy and caseloads in the field. What is more, integration is more controversial than rewarding. It is our profession's great loss and the loss of our constituencies' progress toward the prevention of physical and mental illness and poverty, and the promotion of health, well-being and social justice. Our ideological principles of integration are sorely needed. We have so much knowledge that never is applied to the well-being of people. In order to bring life to an ideology that remains in limbo, a concerted effort must be made to broker research and practice, theory, and policy concerning at-risk populations, creating linkages between them.

#### The Linkage Agent Role

This brokering role is that of a linkage agent.<sup>11</sup> It is a new professional role that many social workers could choose to incorporate into their repertoire of activities, while others could specialize in the task as linkage consultants. The remainder of this paper will provide a rationale for such a conclusion, as well as a summary of fundamental research-based principles integral to such a system. The foundation for this rationale has been provided outside of the field of social work. This is an important point to recognize, for the problems that we face, like their solutions, are not indigenous to the social work profession alone. What is particular to us is our continued insistence upon values and goals intrinsic to social work that elude us year after year. . .after year. . .as other disciplines

and professions (e.g. home economics, business, counselling, nursing, sociology, and psychology) coopt our roles and our cloudy identity fades into oblivion. To correct this trend, I propose that we incorporate into our national resolve that which is being learned about effective knowledge transfer--the linking of information to those who will apply it to their area of concern, whether that concern is social, clinical, policy, program, or research itself. Such linkage should become the core of social work, not an addended function of dissemination and utilization. By focussing on linkage as a central *raison d'etre*, we can establish our professional identity clearly by providing expert value-based linkage services that are needed both in social work and allied fields, as well as in the community at large. Social research scientist Tora Kay Bikson<sup>12</sup> provides the conceptual framework for such a linkage model, a knowledge transfer which she applies to the field of gerontology. It lends itself well to broader social work purposes. The issues relevant to knowledge transfer are divided into three clusters: the resource system, the user system and linkage agents. Despite the existing barriers to integration, I believe that social work could provide this missing link. In order to do so, we first must have a clear understanding of the assumptions that undergird our disparate social work worlds, fostering barriers to integration.

#### The Resource System Model: The Academic World

The resource system is based on the early research and development (R & D) model of information dissemination and utilization. This represents the empirical researcher's perspective of scientific inquiry as a rational process. The traditional assumption has been that the development of new knowledge will automatically lead to its practical application in the

field. Behind the concept of a resource system, then, is the notion that a scientifically generated, empirically supported idea that is relevant to the problems of a particular population will be widely adopted as a matter of course. Dissemination of the information is all that is needed. Useful ideas and technologies thus receive primary emphasis, and documentation is published in scholarly journals, books and so-called "fugitive" documents (those available through the government, reference libraries and more elusive sources). The university represents the chief institution in which the resource system is realized.

#### Academic Barriers to Integration

Traditionally, basic research is conducted by academic faculties, while applied research, generally less respected by "pure academics," is carried out by professional faculties. While social work has extended the tradition, applied research has not been viewed with any more respect within its own ranks. It is ironic, though psychologically understandable, given our dual struggle for professional and academic status, that social work has been one of the last of the social sciences to respect applied research, particularly when employing a qualitative methodology.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, social work research is often as unlikely as research in purely academic disciplines to be relevant to the needs of the "real world".<sup>14</sup> Members of the academic resource system fall prey to a rather circumscribed set of concerns, beliefs, values, and attitudes, not always shared by practitioners and policy makers outside of academe.<sup>15</sup> Lingwood and Havelock have documented this reality in their detailed communications studies.<sup>16</sup> Despite

social work educators' professional rather than purely academic identity, their critique is not necessarily inappropriate.

Besides issues surrounding the resource system's researchers and their controversial "products," criticism also focusses on the medium of dissemination inherent in academic circles. Their only legitimate ways to dispense knowledge is through courses and professional journals and conferences. Many academics are likely to speak only to each other. In social work, academics and practitioners are more able to reach one another through our national collaborative professional meetings. Still, presentations, like articles, are most likely to be centered around academic pursuits, and academics, clinicians and policy analysts often self-select different presentations. There is relatively less professional practitioner input through either presentations or journal articles. Studies indicate that even in "core" scientific journals only half the articles are read by as many as 200 people.<sup>17</sup> We might estimate predictably fewer people read the social work literature. Not all of our social work journals are abstracted by Social Work Research and Abstracts (although other professions are included).<sup>18</sup> Social work literature has only recently gone "on line", providing ready computer access to social work knowledge. Hence, our work is less likely to be cited, much less pursued. It is difficult to take our work seriously with such self-inflicted double messages.

We are to my knowledge the only social science profession yet to cooperate by agreeing to a single referencing format. This results in time and effort wasted on the part of the writer. Other media barriers to dissemination and utilization include the use of technical jargon, lack of emphasis on operational advice, problem-solving and decision-making, as well

as an overwhelming array of unIntegrated Information--unaccessible, disorganized, unsynthesized, and unevaluated. Not only are scholars, including social work educators, often unknowledgeable concerning issues relevant to the field, they are not employed to provide readable articles and texts for nonacademic o: lay audiences. They are even demeaned by higher education administrators and faculties for doing so. Workshops and descriptive papers are considered second rate at best, often labeling the author as second rate if identified with such works. It is clear that the resource system model keeps social work integration from occurring at many levels. What of the user system?

#### The User System Model: The Practice World

The user system concerns the "real world"--the practitioners, policy-makers, and people-at-large in the public and private sectors. This is a problem-solving model which views the user's context as fundamental, stimulating and guiding the scientific inquiry of researchers. Knowledge is no longer conceived as something unidirectionally bestowed on the user by the resource.<sup>19</sup> User participation is inherent in the process, conceptually defined in four stages by Ogden and Miesumeci<sup>20</sup> and Radnor, Hofler, and Rich.<sup>21</sup> The first stage is "spread"--the one-way flow of information. The second is "exchange"--a dyadic or polyadic communication. The third stage is "choice" in which the user can review and select resource options. And the fourth stage is "implementation"--making use of the resource system to facilitate adaptation of the chosen alternative. The user system appears to be much more acceptable to integration. When we address the particulars inherent in the model, however, we find that appearances may be deceptive.

### Practice Barriers to Integration

The user system, in fact, is less easily characterized than the resource system. It is less cohesive in nature since the profession consists of independent practitioners who are dispersed throughout the community, often isolated in private practice or constrained by agencies. Social workers may be alone in small rural or urban offices, or at the bottom of large interdisciplinary institutional hierarchies. Their roles are so diverse that they may identify with more similar colleagues in allied professions, rather than within their own. Many choose not to be identified as social workers. They have little in common with their academic colleagues, and they are hard put to find alliances in the larger social work community. Or so it would seem.

What they do have in common is a need for quick, current, practical, reliable answers to pressing questions. Contemporary social work literature reflects this need.<sup>22</sup> Gordon, and Hanrahan and Reid, are representative of those who have attempted to develop guidelines for systematically deriving practice applications from research.<sup>23</sup> Evaluation of research is key. Gordon's model consists of three evaluative systems: 1) an algorithm for specifying the significant variables in social work tasks, making them identifiable and explicit; 2) a way of analyzing knowledge and methodologies found in research reports; and 3) a match-mismatch system for comparing the two, bringing them both into relationship. Gordon's work provides important insights and should not be dismissed. But Berg and Theado's study of the utilization of evaluative research in twelve social welfare programs suggests that there is no relationship between research methodology and utilization and that the problems of utilization require

greater attention.<sup>24</sup> Evaluation must be understood as a cooperative process in which the requirements of program decision-makers should play as important a role as the standards of research methodology, and so it is with all knowledge relevant to social work values, concerns and utilization.<sup>25</sup>

Karger argues for a "democratization" of the research process, stressing that the integration of research and practice cannot be expected until methodologies other than quantitative are developed and respected.<sup>26</sup> Recognizing that knowledge concerning the utility and meaning of particular behaviors must be gained from involvement in the ongoing lives of human beings, Haworth suggests that the practitioner is in the ideal position to be a researcher. A qualitative, wholistic paradigm, he contends, would relieve social workers of the need to apologize for anecdotal data which can provide the most appropriate understanding of human processes.<sup>27</sup> Social work educators, Imre and Welck, among others, also have made convincing philosophical arguments for a wholistic approach to social work practice if we are to implement that which we profess.<sup>28</sup> The field of child abuse, in fact, has made substantive contributions, applying research to public policy.<sup>29</sup>

It has become clear that social work practitioners have a great fund of knowledge of their own--knowledge that goes untapped due to their fragmentation as a group and to a hierarchical snobbery that obviates perceiving them as a resource, as well as a user of knowledge. But pride has many faces. The reality is that the practitioners who call for applied research relevant to practice are often the same people who set up barriers, labeling the operationalization of theory and research as unprofessional

"how to" information. There appears to be a universal "set up" against the integration of knowledge at every turn. It is time to take stock of our professional schizophrenia that inhibits the transfer of knowledge by all constituent groups.

#### The Linking System Model

Bikson,<sup>30</sup> like Yates<sup>31</sup> before her, concludes that researchers and practitioners engage in "relatively self contained" pursuits. A more successful system needs to be devised whereby populations-at-risk derive optimal benefit from research. Linkage agents (or agencies) would provide a one- or two-way communication between researchers and the real world, facilitating the transfer of research and the solving of user problems. Linkage agents by definition must be accessible to a multiplicity of resources and users. Research ideas would then be synthesized and adapted to practitioner contexts, while practitioners' ideas and problems would be synthesized for the researcher. By focussing on the relationship between the researcher and user, the integration and implementation of theory, research, practice and policy could be achieved.

The seriousness of the adoption time-lag was underscored over a decade ago by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and Human Interaction Research Institute (HIRI).<sup>32</sup> In more recent years, emphasis in social work has been on the linkage aspects of resource and user (academia and practice) systems, forming the soft underbelly of an already vulnerable profession. Both fields are exhorted by its professional associations to improve their system and the implementation of practice-based research. Students are being educated to be research-practitioners (a role they seldom carry out

beyond graduation). In fact, the National Institute of Mental Health reports year after year that social workers from all fields submit few research proposals annually. The realization of integration, given the lack of institutional rewards, bodes ill for social work despite its efforts.

With a linkage system at the helm, the means for integrating research and practice concerns in the mental health and social welfare arenas, the two-pronged foci of social work, could become a reality. A relevant data base regarding at-risk populations would be maintained, establishing the bases for priority decision-making. Without such a linking system model, the values of social work are likely to remain unrealized abstractions--our research endeavors garnering knowledge fragments, unintegrated and underutilized. But research integration and utilization are not sufficient goals.

Services must encompass the integration of knowledge in the many other arenas of our concern. The same difficulties exist when we try to span domestic and global policies, practice and programs. We struggle with the integration of gender, ethnicity, class, and lifespan issues. Interdisciplinary knowledge often remains untapped, and conceptual frameworks are unexplored relative to our professed values and ethics. The list is open-ended but not ad infinitum, not an impossible abstract ideal. Professional, focussed attention to our many dilemmas is required, a linkage service capability that will provide conceptual expertise, as well as a clearinghouse for social work specific integrative resources throughout the nation, even the world. These resources may be information based upon research about the state of knowledge, or they may provide references to people, disciplines, or institutions who have expert knowledge. Linkage is the watchword, not research alone.

Massive institutional change is needed, but it would take years to establish in most settings. We don't have time as a profession to wait for such r/evolution, and our clients and the people of America don't have time to wait patiently for relevance. An alternative linking system would bridge the time gap. To be successful, attention must be paid to staffing and program requirements.

### Linkage Staffing Concerns

There is a substantive body of research that reinforces the need for linking systems, but the transfer of knowledge from one system to another depends upon the existence of particular attributes.<sup>33</sup> If integration is to occur at any level, these conditions must be met. Members of different systems must share a social structure, participate in a common communications network, and have the same norms, attitudes, values and referent groups. At first one might assume that social workers hold these qualities in common. The points made earlier on, however, indicate that we may have a common heritage, but that our structures, communications and norms are quite diverse. One cannot assume that a so-called resource group member or the user will be a mutually trusted or respected information source. One must conclude that linkage agents should not be part of either group if they are to be effective for both. The staffing of a national social work linkage service dedicated to the integration of knowledge and practice, then, must be considered thoughtfully. Linkage agents must be knowledgeable generalists, having respect for both camps, as well as the ability to communicate in the practitioner's language, across disciplines, in the researcher's world, and to translate both for the lay person. While linkage agents must have knowledge of research and practice, they need not

be content experts. Still, they must have special knowledge regarding at-risk populations, for the process of change, for qualitative and quantitative design, for access of knowledge, and for implementation and evaluation procedures. Their roles as facilitators fit well with the social worker's identity, enhancing trust, maintaining relationships, and using cognitive skills. All are familiar qualities for social work professionals. Perhaps less common are essential synthetic conceptual abilities which can unite seemingly disparate systems. Interdisciplinary, national and even international perspectives are desirable.

#### Linkage Program Concerns<sup>34</sup>

Research concerning effective knowledge transfer intermediaries further suggests that

- 1) linkage needs to facilitate continuous, two-way interaction, incorporating temporary collaboration, but providing ongoing support--before, during and following implementation;
- 2) there needs to be face-to-face interaction with knowledge seekers and knowledge providers;
- 3) linkage agencies or institutions (not just individuals) are needed,<sup>35</sup> hence the importance of a National Social Work Linkage Service; and
- 4) multi-media approaches to two-way knowledge transfer are necessary.

Telephone services (ideally a toll free number), videotapes, in-service training, on-site visits, exchange visits, access to literature (including "fugitive" documents), synthesis of both research and practice issues--all are integral to a linking system. The linkage service should act as an

"Issues and Interventions clearinghouse," keeping informed about research and development products and their evaluation. It also should be on the alert for resource people who are privy to practice, policy and community needs for future research and development. Methods should be designed for the synthesis of values and ethics, as well as epidemiological knowledge which synthesizes common denominators concerning at-risk populations, implementing knowledge for the prevention of individual and social problems.<sup>36</sup> We must reconsider seriously social work's adoption of the orthodox sciences' conception of respected research as knowledge production that is legitimate only if it is value-free.<sup>37</sup>

#### Operationalizing Social Work Objectives

Bikson details the following operational objectives to be accomplished by linking institutions. They translate neatly to a social work linkage capability.<sup>38</sup> Linkage agents

- . must have the capability to efficiently search for, locate, and retrieve desired informational resources;
- . must expend considerable effort synthesizing (organizing, integrating and evaluating) that which has been retrieved;
- . should be able to help translate research and development reports into practical, how-to-do-it advice;
- . should facilitate interactions concerning the adaptive implementation of information presented and/or received.

A quality linkage capability thus would be dedicated to the operationalization of the values and principles of integration and interaction inherent in social work. Besides realizing our mission in the

process of implementing such services, we would take giant steps toward resolving social work's deep-seated conflicts concerning our commitment to integration. To provide a united image, and to bring abstract homilies into the realm of reality should lead to a positive experience of personal and professional identity. There is no doubt that we are the profession who remains committed to social justice and the betterment of humankind through individual and social development. Others come and go with fashion and funding. The trend in the eighties is a unique phenomena. Social services are denigrated while social work is being coopted by the social sciences, business and other helping professions. They often ignore social work, taking on such social problems as family dysfunction, substance abuse, violence, and eating disorders. The bold facts may be known to each discipline, but social justice concerns usually are overlooked and interdisciplinary perspectives are lacking. We must not sit by ineffectually.

It is time for social work to stand up and be counted--to come into its own, to turn ourselves around by taking charge of our myriad arenas of expertise. It is time that we were visibly in the vanguard, acting on our values and our many strengths; that we put an end to our identity crisis--in short that we activate our authentic, collective self. To do so, we must be clear about who we are to be and to become. I suggest that the establishment of a National Social Work Linkage Service also will provide the missing link of authentic identity. The social work profession then would provide the missing link between knowledge and the empowerment of people. We needn't be missing from the scene any longer. . .or to use

Millay's metaphor, social work could provide the loom on which to "weave into fabric the wisdom of the day."<sup>39</sup>

### Provisos

First, it is essential that a National Social Work Linkage Service be dedicated to the values that we espouse--serving the profession, not mandating regulations. We must guard against homogenizing pressures that serve only to bureaucratize and dilute a potentially rich constituency. (The adjective, rich, reflects quality, not dollars--a distinction all too clear to social workers). Second, it is important to note that a national service is not meant to usurp or prevent Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) ventures, social work schools, and local or regional efforts. Again, integration is essential. Each subsystem would provide information for the other, with the national service providing the communication resource for all. Ideally, in cooperation with CSWE and schools of social work, curriculum would be developed, training social workers in the art and science of linkage capability. As conceptualized, all students eventually would be exposed to the concepts, while others would develop expertise. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the ideas put forth could be implemented incrementally as financing becomes available. Local integrative work could be done, for example, through schools of social work and the state chapters of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). When computer services are made available, local efforts could be shared nationally. Neither is there a reason to wait to cooperate professionally concerning the universal adoption of a journal format or comprehensive abstracting services for all social work journals. Schools could agree to share abstracts of faculty and student work. Once in place, many services

could be routinely implemented. Still, our efforts to develop a full-fledged linkage service should not be taken lightly or considered to be outside the realm of possibility.

#### Funding of National Social Work Linkage Services

Bikson points out that it is unlikely that linking institutions can pay for themselves. I submit that social work schools, agencies and individuals within them, as well as allied fields, would be willing to pay a fee for such services. The linkage service should be incorporated into NASW's newly established National Center for Social Policy and Practice. The Center is conceptualized as an "instrument through which practice and social policy are linked in dynamic fashion." NASW intends to

develop the means whereby policy insights and practitioners are systematically collected, analyzed, summarized and made available to those concerned with policy issues.<sup>40</sup>

They plan to work with members, chapters, and others, including all levels of government. Included in their plan is the public education, continuing education and collaboration with other social work organizations and schools concerned with the "inextricable bond between practice and policy." The Center's mission clearly is well-suited to the purposes of the proposed National Linkage Service. Existing resistance would be offset by the inclusion of the linkage service, because it provides a tangible product. Even as conceptualized presently, if the Center is to be truly successful, the barrier concepts that have been presented here must be taken into consideration. Academia and the practice community must join forces to forge the missing link in social work.

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