Practice & theory-building: examining an age-friendly guide

Rural + Development + Planning Symposium
Feb 22, 2012

Bill Ashton, MCIP, PhD
Director, Rural Development Institute
Brandon University, Brandon, MB
Objectives

- Examine practice to inform theory-building about rural + development + planning

Outline

- My ‘praxis’ argument
- Rural MB
- Intervention
- Impact
- Reflections & questions about implications for theory-building and practice
Theory ... to ... Practice

OR

Practice ... to ... Theory

OR

Theory building process:
- Observations
- Hypotheses
- Testing
- Refining

Suggesting evidence based knowledge is created by:
1) Old replaced with new
2) Add new to old
3) Challenge old, new unclear
My ‘praxis’ argument

Past and present

Rural (Northern MB)

Future

Changes to
- Built environment
- Social dynamics

Development (Intervention) + Planning (Impact)

*Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: GUIDE*
Northern MB – selected profile

- 129 centres, 70% Aboriginal comm.
- 85,168 pop, 7% MB pop
- Aboriginal identity 72% vs 16% MB
- Avg Age 25 vs 38 yrs MB
- Seniors 18% vs 32% MB (50+)
- Avg Income $13k/yr vs $24k MB
- % Income: gov 30% vs 13% MB
- 51% no high school vs 26% MB

Source: StatCda 2006
Development - intervention

- **Goal**: active, healthy seniors, 65+ yrs
- **Guide development**: 10 rural centres, 600-5000 pop, Port Hope Simpson, NFL; Gimli, MB; Alert Bay, BC
- **8 domains of impact**
  - **Built x3**: bldgs, transp, housing
  - **Social x5**: Respect seniors, engage them, civic involvement, connect, health services
Impact of intervention

Checklist (products x117)
- Continuous sidewalks
- Disability transportation
- Events – intergenerational
- Employment, volunteer

Milestones (process x5)
- Establish committee
- Municipal resolution
- Plan of action
- Public awareness
- Measured outcomes
Implications of Northern MB on guide

- Many centres, widely dispersed
- Younger age, fewer seniors
- Lower education attainment
- 44% lower income, govt subsidy
- Aboriginal identity, elder tradition
Reflections – practice & theory building

Practice
- Planning policy
- Power (governance)
- Social Justice
- Community learning

Building theory
- H:
- H:
- H:
- H:
Reflections – practice & theory building

Practice                          Building theory

Planning policy
Verb: process, doing       H: participatory models, ACF
Noun: plan, product       H: incremental
Public policy-Ltd market     H: redistribution of wealth

Power (governance)
Guide = as outside authority    H:
Local cmt: same or new members?    H:
Limited financial & HR resources    H:
Strategic choice: ecology of basic needs H:
Reflections – practice & theory building

Practice

**Social justice**
- Most vulnerable seniors
- Trade-offs: favour needs
- Address root causes
- Obligation: no harm
- Responsibility: ensure impact

Community learning
- Bld on what we know and do
- New learning: process, plan
- Succession of leadership
1. How did this example of practice inform theory?

2. What’s the theory about?
   i) building theory for thriving centres (end) or
   ii) building theory for practice of thriving (process)?

3. Is practice too complicated for building a theory? Are many theories needed?

4. Why is it important that practice is related to theory and theory related to practice?
Thank you

• Questions?
• Suggestions?