



**Diffusion of Innovations and
Science-Based Practices to
Address Barriers to Learning
& Improve Schools:**

**A Series of Information
Resources on
Enabling System Change**

As calls for addressing barriers to student learning and improving schools increase, new directions are imperative. And, this involves more than tinkering with prevailing approaches. The need is for developing major innovations (e.g., comprehensive school-level prototypes) and taking them to scale throughout a school district.

The success of all this depends on stakeholders in public education becoming more knowledgeable about the complexities and strategies related to diffusion of innovations, enabling major systemic changes, and developing a *sophisticated* understanding of the role of empirically-based practices.

To these ends, the Center is producing a series of resources, such as this one, to provide informational aids for use as tools in policy and practice analyses, research, education, and school improvement planning.

**Intro to Multi-Level Community Based
Culturally Situated Interventions**

The June 2009 issue of the *American Journal of Community Psychology* focuses on what is now being called Multilevel Dynamic System Intervention Science (MDSIS). It encompasses concerns about systemic change and diffusion of innovations.

The articles dealing with this topic and links to each are online at <http://www.metapress.com/content/w21311t65148/?p=df876227c3404f0fb381ed2c591afd42&pi=0>

To provide a sense of this important work, this information brief presents some excerpts from the series introduction and summary by the series editors Jean J. Schensul and Edison J. Trickett and the abstracts of the papers each wrote for the series.

Intro to Multi-Level Community Based Culturally Situated Interventions

The interventions described in this special issue all involve internal flexibility to adapt messages and intervention components to local community needs on an ongoing basis. The capacity to adapt an intervention without losing its basic intention and core components is critical to intervention delivery in a multilevel dynamic systems environment.

Jean J. Schensul and Edison Trickett

From: **Introduction to Multi-Level Community Based Culturally Situated Interventions** by Jean J. Schensul and Edison Trickett

The introduction to this series notes that (a) a framework is offered for the concept of “level” in intervention science, (b) the articles advocate for “multi-level” approaches to social/behavioral change, and (c) anthropologists and psychologists involved in community based collaborative intervention research critically examine assumptions, processes and results of multilevel interventions in local communities with local partners. The series is described as raising a number of important issues. For example: (1) How are levels defined and how should collaborators be chosen? (2) Does it matter at which level multilevel interventions begin? (3) Do multilevel interventions have a greater effect on desired outcomes than level-specific interventions? (4) Are multilevel interventions more sustainable? (5) Are multilevel interventions cost effective to run, and evaluate? (6) How can theories of intervention be generated and adapted to each level of a multilevel intervention? (7) How should intervention activities at each level coordinate to facilitate community resident or target population empowerment?

From: **Summary Comments: Multi-Level Community Based Culturally Situated Intervention** by Edison J. Trickett and Jean J. Schensul

Emphasizing Intervention as Change at Multiple Levels – Overall the varied conceptual frameworks outlined in this volume converge on the central point that multilevel interventions are based on the assumption that sociocultural systems are dynamic, and that in order to bring about structural, norms, and individual level change, it is important to intervene at multiple levels concurrently. All multilevel interventions take the position that if change occurs at the individual level, it will quickly revert if there are not social and structural supports available at other levels to support or reinforce individual level changes. Institutions must step in either quietly or with much noise and battle to ensure that the interests of those committed to change at individual levels can be achieved through policy and social structural change. Thus, multilevel interventions are also structural and contextual interventions, focused on systemic (policy and institutional) and social (peer, community organization, family) change, independent of though intertwined with individual level change

The Power of Conceiving of Multilevel Interventions as Culturally Situated and Community-Based – We believe, however, that the power of multilevel interventions is increased when they are both community-based and culturally situated. Within a multilevel approach, it is critical to identify primary local cultural themes and notions that can be applied across levels. ... This emphasis differs from that of prevention science, where it is customary to develop theoretical frameworks derived from psychological theories in single settings, and adapt them for community interventions elsewhere. This model has been exported, often inappropriately, to other parts of the world, especially in HIV related work. However, US. researchers working with nationally and culturally distinct populations have developed many strategies for building interventions based on indigenous cultural concepts, guidelines or “hooks”. These new, culturally nuanced and more situated approaches may emerge from close engagement with and intimate knowledge of study populations which allow for adaptation of interventions successful elsewhere, and from formative research partnerships with country or group specific social scientists and their networks

In addition, the community-based perspective reflected in the special issue papers engages members of the local community in systematic reflection on their own cultural models, and the translation of those models into messages or intervention theory and practice Yet another consequence of this process involves the co-construction of science based and indigenous knowledge to develop an intervention strategy that counters standard approaches to health literacy

From: Community, Culture and Sustainability in Multilevel Dynamic Systems Intervention Science by Jean J. Schensul

Abstract: This paper addresses intertwined issues in the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of multilevel dynamic systems intervention science (MDSIS). Interventions are systematically planned, conducted and evaluated social science-based cultural products intercepting the lives of people and institutions in the context of multiple additional events and processes (which also may be referred to as interventions) that may speed, slow or reduce change towards a desired outcome. Multilevel interventions address change efforts at multiple social levels in the hope that effects at each level will forge synergistic links, facilitating movement toward desired change. This paper utilizes an ecological framework that identifies macro (policy and regulatory institutions), meso (organizations and agencies with resources, and power) and micro (individuals, families and friends living in communities) interacting directly and indirectly. An MDSIS approach hypothesizes that change toward a goal will occur faster and more effectively when synchronized and supported across levels in a social system. MDSIS approaches by definition involve “whole” communities and cannot be implemented without the establishments of working community partnerships. This paper takes a dynamic systems approach to science as conducted in communities, and discusses four concepts that are central to MDSIS – science, community, culture, and sustainability. These concepts are important in community based participatory research and to the targeting, refinement, and adaptation of enduring interventions. Consistency in their meaning and use can promote forward movement in the field of MDSIS, and in community-based prevention science.

From: Multilevel Community-Based Culturally Situated Interventions and Community Impact: An Ecological Perspective by Edison J. Trickett.

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to apply an ecological perspective to the conduct of multilevel community-based culturally-situated interventions. After a discussion of the emerging consensus about the value of approaching such interventions ecologically, the paper outlines a series of questions stimulated by an ecological perspective that can guide further theory development in conducting multilevel interventions. These questions all derive from the importance of assessing the local community ecology where the intervention occurs. The paper concludes with a series of topics which, taken together, provide a roadmap for further conceptual development of multilevel interventions as vehicles for long-range community impact.

The Center's Series of Information Resources on Enabling System Change

*Diffusion of Innovations and Science-Based Practices to
Address Barriers to Learning & Improve Schools*

- >Brief Overview of a Major Review by L.W. Green, et al. (2009) entitled: Diffusion Theory and Knowledge Dissemination, Utilization, and Integration in Public Health
- >Brief Overview of Major Concepts from E.M. Rogers' Work on Diffusion of Innovations
- >Brief Overview of Malcolm Gladwell's Concept of the Tipping Point
- >Some Key Terms Related to Enabling System Change
- >Systemic Change for School Improvement
- >Change Agent Mechanisms for School Improvement: Infrastructure not Individuals
- >System Change and Empirically-Supported Practices: The Implementation Problem
- >Policy Implications for Advancing Systemic Change for School Improvement
- >Some Key References Related to Enabling System Change
- >Dissemination Focused on Diffusion: Some Guidelines
- >Diffusion: In Pursuit of Action
- >Excerpts from Child Trends' series of Research-to Results Briefs on Adopting, Implementing, Sustaining, and Replicating Evidence-Based Practices
- >Making and Disseminating Recommendations is Not Sufficient
- >Intro to Multi-Level Community Based Culturally Situated Interventions