

Esperanza Familiar: A University-Community Partnership as a Social Learning Network

Richard S. Kordesh
University of Illinois at Chicago

Abstract

Social network analysis can aid in the design and assessment of the complex relationships involved in university-community partnerships. This article recounts the creation of Esperanza Familiar, a new family education and support initiative in Chicago's Pilsen community. It demonstrates how a social learning network involving many diverse participants evolved through the phases of assessment, planning, and implementation. Using variables common in network analysis—size, density, centrality, and others—the article illuminates communication and influence patterns that enabled participants and researchers to gather knowledge relevant to their shared substantive interests. The social learning network fed useful knowledge simultaneously into diverse domains: community theory and practice seminars in the university, parent education seminars in neighborhood churches, and steering committee meetings involving faculty, students, parents, clergy, and community organization staff.

Since summer 1996, supported by seed funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC), the Jane Addams College of Social Work (henceforth referred to as the College), University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), and The Resurrection Project (TRP), a community development corporation in Chicago's Pilsen community, have forged a new partnership around the empowerment of families. That partnership has created Esperanza Familiar (Family Hope), a new initiative aimed at strengthening the capacities of Pilsen families to care for their own members, solve their own problems, and strengthen their community. In addition to pursuing the central goal of empowering families, the partnership consciously encourages institutional learning. That learning affects TRP staff practices, classroom education at the College, faculty-student research, and the ongoing design of Esperanza Familiar's own curriculum.

Using the concept of a social learning network, this article describes and analyzes the formation of Esperanza Familiar. It follows the evolution of the network established by the project through its assessment, planning and early implementation stages in fall 1998. It argues that when integrated with the above stages, network analysis can reveal some of the important, underlying dynamics in complex university-community partnerships, helping them achieve diverse objectives pursued by diverse participants.

Analytical Context

The term *social learning network* refers to people connected routinely through interactions that serve the common purpose of knowledge development. This view of a learning network differs somewhat from a currently popular use of the term. That popular use sees a learning network as a computer learning network, often established as part of a school improvement strategy. While Esperanza Familiar's social learning network functions partially through technological connections, it is social relationships that make it a network.

Scholarly literature on the formation of social networks varies in whether it views network building as a planned process or one that results as a social byproduct of interactions among diverse actors who see themselves pursuing other goals. Sociological treatments of social networks have shown that networks often form absent an intentional organizing strategy (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982; Scott, 1991). However, applied disciplines such as social work tend to use network analysis as a guide for deliberate social change (Hardcastle, Wenocur, and Powers, 1997; Murty, 1998). In the latter works, network analysis helps assess the existing relationships in a community prior to a planned intervention.

This article demonstrates that network analysis can be applied fruitfully to the creation of a complex university-community partnership. It differs from previous studies in that, rather than mapping networks prior to an intervention, it uses network analysis as a steering tool in the formation of a new network.

Indeed, a learning network is a particularly apt concept for university-community partnerships: Learning focuses on knowledge acquisition, an underlying goal of research; teaching; and many types of community practice. A social learning network is defined here as persons and organizations linked routinely by a shared interest in knowledge development and utilization. The knowledge of interest in this project is that which advances the objective of family empowerment.

The analysis will utilize six criteria common in the network literature (Hardcastle, Wenocur, and Powers, 1997): size, density, coordination, centrality, symmetry, and domain consensus. *Size* simply refers to the number of participants. *Density* refers to the actual number of relationships compared with the possible number of relationships. A large network can have low density, for example, if it contains many participants, but they do not often interact. High density is present when many participants are interacting frequently. *Coordination* addresses the level of conscious, mutual planning and adjustment that takes place in the network among participants. *Centrality* refers to the extent to which participants must communicate with a particular person or organization in order to interact with other participants. A highly centralized network is one in which all participants must interact with one particular person or organizational unit to get a decision approved or to acquire information. *Symmetry* focuses on the balance of resources and critical activities among various units of the network, especially as those resources and activities affect the network's central purpose. In this analysis, that central purpose is knowledge development and dissemination. *Domain consensus* is the agreement among participating

units—persons, organizations, or suborganizational divisions—about their varied responsibilities and functions.

Viewing Esperanza Familiar as a social learning network, this analysis addresses the following questions:

- 1) How does a university-community partnership change as it evolves through the stages of the project development cycle (assessment, planning, and implementation)?
- 2) What characteristics of social learning networks are the most critical for advancing the varied research, teaching, and service objectives of a university-community partnership?
- 3) What network research is needed to further understand the impacts of university-community partnerships on families?

Community Setting

Located directly to the south of the UIC campus, Pilsen has long served as one of Chicago's primary ports-of-entry for new immigrant groups. In fact Pilsen was named by its Czech immigrants after a similarly named city in their homeland. The Irish, Czech, Polish, and other European immigrants who predominated in Pilsen through the 1950s have been followed by immigrants largely from Mexico. Pilsen today is almost wholly a Hispanic community, with persons of Mexican heritage, many of them recent arrivals, predominating.

Located on Chicago's Lower West Side, Pilsen lies 1 mile south of the university campus. Its population is best characterized as working poor. According to the 1990 census, 88 percent of Pilsen's 46,000 residents are Latino; most of them of Mexican heritage.

Pilsen is a vibrant, bustling, poor community with many strengths and many problems. As Janise Hurtig (1996) puts it: "In Pilsen, one encounters what appears to be a charming, lively, even thriving *barrio* [Spanish for ghetto or neighborhood], the street lined with *taquerías* [taco restaurants], *panaderías* [Mexican bakeries], street vendors, and colorful murals on near every street corner." But amid these signs of vitality live families facing many pressing problems.

The 1990 census found that 28.9 percent of the Lower West Side (which includes the neighboring "Little Village," also a predominantly Mexican-American community area) lived below the poverty level. Families live in the most overcrowded conditions of any neighborhood in Chicago. Few—21.5 percent—own their own homes. The public high school in Pilsen, Benito Juarez, has among the highest dropout rates in the city. Gangs are quite active in Pilsen and often begin recruiting children in the third and fourth grades. Generation gaps between parents and children are strained by the fact that many youth are second-generation North Americans, while their parents are of the first generation. The parents hold more fervently to traditional Mexican customs and tend, more than their offspring, to speak Spanish as their first language.

Creation of Esperanza Familiar

Describing the social learning network that has formed around Esperanza Familiar first requires a description of the project's origins. In 1996 some of TRP's leaders—in particular, Rev. Charles Dahm, pastor of St. Pius Parish; Raul Raymundo, TRP's executive director; and Joseph Neri, TRP's associate director—were concerned that the churches had been encountering more families experiencing problems than they were able to serve. In

addition, TRP and church leaders were generally dissatisfied with the counseling services available to Pilsen residents outside of the churches. They sought to establish a more community-based, culturally competent program, with cultural competence including adeptness with the Catholic faith as a resource (Catholicism is the faith of the majority of Pilsen's Mexican-American population). Moreover, given TRP's emphasis on empowerment in its organizing and community development activity, these leaders wanted services available to families that would emphasize education and mutual help rather than therapy. Indeed, they referred to the early settlement house as an appealing model.¹

At the same time, just prior to its contact with TRP, the College had begun planning to develop more community-based, faculty-student teams who would provide service and conduct research in nearby neighborhoods. The College's dean, Creasie Finney Hairston, had been negotiating one possible site with a family service agency in the Chicago's Near West Side. Thus with TRP's interest in a community-based, family empowerment initiative, and with the College's interest in community-based education and research, the predispositions of critical leaders were ripe for a partnership to form.

The emergence of the partnership was triggered by TRP's request to UIC's Great Cities program for assistance in developing a new program to empower families. In turn, the Great Cities office contacted the College about TRP's request. The College expressed interest in exploring a possible project, and Great Cities arranged a meeting between the two parties. Soon thereafter, supported with COPC funds provided by Great Cities, three graduate students supervised by Professor Robert Weagant began conducting a community assessment.

The students worked through summer 1996. They met regularly with Weagant, Reverend Dahm, Neri, and Megan Reilly, a community organizer on St. Pius' staff, to review their methods and findings.

Reilly and other parish staff helped the students conduct focus groups with different groups of Pilsen residents: mothers, teens, undocumented persons, and fathers. Reilly was the critical link with the parishes in recruiting participants and scheduling rooms in which to meet. Reilly also observed several of the sessions and helped critique the summaries that students wrote about the sessions.

The assessment data intensified the planning group's work. In fall 1996 the group began to refer to itself as a steering committee, and it began to expand. At this point Richard Kordesh, this article's author, began to serve as the faculty liaison between TRP and the College. A team of three student interns, two of whom were new, began serving as staff to the steering committee and subcommittees that were being formed. The steering committee expanded to include more clergy, parish staff, and agency representatives.

During the next 9 months, the steering committee addressed many planning issues. It agreed on the project's mission statement: to support and strengthen families by promoting healthy self-esteem, strengthening interpersonal relations within the family by improving communication skills, and integrating the family into participation in the larger community.

It studied many family education and support models from around the United States, especially those focusing on Latino families. Kordesh delivered a workshop from his research on "family empowerment associations" (Kordesh, 1995.) Students compiled profiles of potential public and private funding sources. A flowchart was designed to depict how families who took classes would then be able to form support groups and

receive counseling services. Consistent with the mission statement, the chart also depicted the steering committee's interest in helping families who would take classes to join existing institutions such as block clubs, small faith communities, and TRP's small business cooperative.

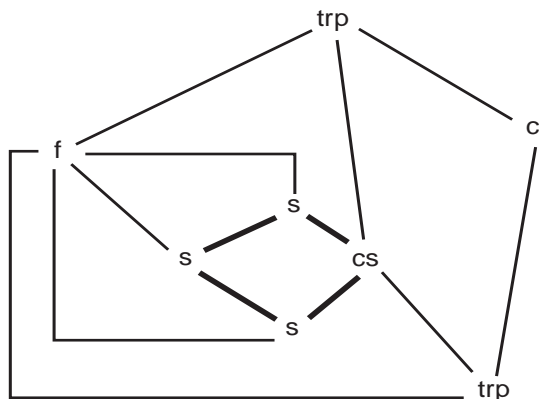
Satisfied with its initial program model, TRP began seeking small foundation grants to support the new position of Esperanza Familiar director. During spring 1997 two local foundations agreed to provide funding. In January 1998 Esperanza Familiar's new director, Melenne Mosquera, began working with TRP. Aided by the planning that had continued through the steering committee (buttressed by a new team of the College's graduate students), Mosquera began recruiting families into classes at two parish sites and at Centro de Familiar Guadalupano, a childcare center located in TRP's main building. She also continued negotiating with a neighborhood public school to sponsor an Esperanza Familiar class for its parents. By fall 1998 Esperanza Familiar was in full swing, having graduated one class of families at St. Adelbert parish in Pilsen and implemented others. A new team of three students, supervised by Kordesh, was working with Esperanza Familiar and the steering committee.

Studying Esperanza Familiar as a Social Learning Network

Although not discussed explicitly in such terms, participants in the project had a social learning network in mind when they predicted what would be the eventual benefits of the project. At early planning meetings, members of the steering committee discussed how this project would create not only an innovative approach to strengthening urban families but also would generate new knowledge for social work education and research as well. Participants from TRP and the university recognized that these new learning benefits would also flow through the steering committee outward into the community and into the university.

Exhibit 1

Stage 1 Network: Assessment Phase



Key: s=student, trp=TRP staff, cs=church staff, cl=clergy, f=faculty

Stage 1 Network: Summer 1996–January 1997, The Assessment Phase

Exhibit 1 depicts the beginning social learning network as it began to form in September 1996. The project's steering committee had begun to analyze the data collected by the student researchers. Reviewing the minutes of that meeting reveals that essentially six persons—three students, a TRP board member (who was also a pastor of a Pilsen Catholic parish), a church staff member, and the associate director of TRP—constituted the study group. TRP's Executive Director Raul Raymundo also attended assessment meetings regularly. In addition to analyzing the assessment data gathered by students, the group discussed inviting Kordesh, then newly arrived at the College, to join them at its next meeting. The knowledge development task was clear. The intent was to formulate an initial understanding of the mental health needs of Pilsen families and the services currently available to them.

At this early, exploratory phase of the project, there was no particular program model that participants shared. Nor was there an agreed-upon name for the initiative. The varied labels steering committees used for the initiative—"family mental health," "an alternative school for families," a "family support center without walls"—reflected how unformed the actual program model was in the thinking of this first group.

The shape of the network in Exhibit 1 depicts the absence of a definitive center in this early phase. Meetings were relatively unstructured and operated by consensus. Debate and brainstorming were vigorous. Chairing meetings was referred to as facilitating, and this task was rotated among different members. Meetings were lively and open. Density was already strong: there was active and ongoing communication within this small network at and between meetings. Density was fed by the fact that the student interns worked closely as a team in the same office at TRP, and that the clergy and staff associated with the parish and TRP worked either in the same buildings or only a few blocks from each other. Moreover, parish and TRP members were linked in intensive relationships due to the close organizational interdependency between their institutions.

Coordination was simple and relatively smooth, given the clear task and the smallness of the network. Probably the most challenging coordination task was convening focus groups at the parishes. Reilly took the lead on making arrangements, recruiting parents and youth subjects and ensuring compatibility with church schedules. Symmetry at this stage was not a pressing issue, given the network's size. Domain consensus was arrived at easily due to the straightforward nature of the assessment task.

Learning was clearly a major shared goal from the outset. Whatever form the program would take, it was agreed that it would be an education-based initiative. Reverend Dahm and others reflected how the early settlement houses had been similarly education-based. Students saw their work as an opportunity to learn new approaches to practicing community-based, rather than agency-based social work. Kordesh, Reilly, and other College faculty discussed how this project would create a feedback loop into the College, generating knowledge that could eventually be used in curriculum reform. Kordesh and Weagant both began using seminar sessions in community theory courses and policy courses to examine the implications of the project for practice and research. Kordesh and Hairston, the College's dean, submitted a proposal during fall 1996 for funding to study the implications of the project for curriculum reform in graduate social work education.

Stage 2 Network: February 1997–January 1998, The Planning Phase

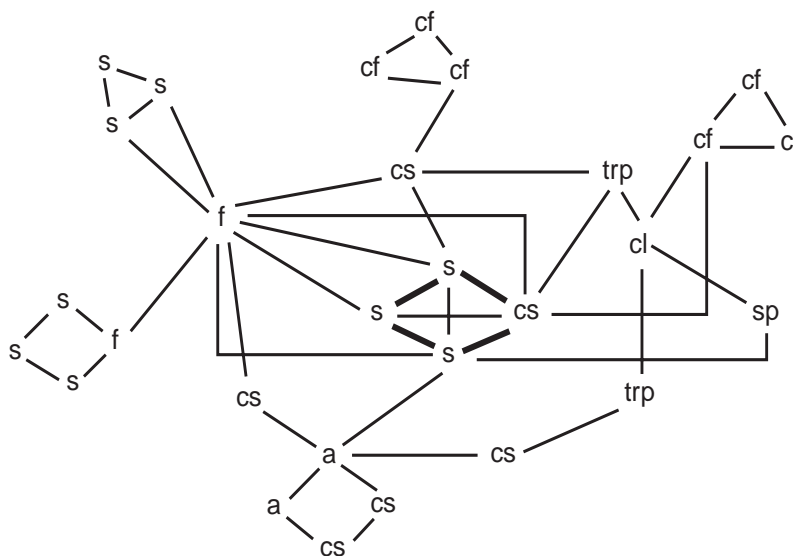
By February 1997 the network had clearly expanded and the vision of the program-to-be had noticeably sharpened. It would offer classes for families, help families from the classes form ongoing support groups, and provide counseling where needed. It would also cultivate leadership: a few parents each year would be trained to teach classes themselves. The project would also encourage families to join TRP’s block clubs and the “base communities” already active in the parishes.

Exhibit 2 depicts how the original, small network in Stage 1 had grown to include more members. TRP had hired Juan Salgado as community programs director. The new program, which by then had been named Esperanza Familiar (Family Hope), would be placed under Salgado’s oversight. Salgado’s addition to the steering committee hastened the process of fund development considerably. New proposals for foundation funds were drafted. The process of proposal development led to a further clarification of the project’s strategies for strengthening families.

Another impetus to the network’s expansion was the exploration of possible parish and public school sites for Esperanza Familiar’s classes and counseling. Whereas staff and clergy from St. Pius parish had been the most active participants during the first phase, staff and clergy from St. Adalbert and St. Procopius parishes also became involved regularly. In addition, Maria Iniguez, a Pilsen resident and social worker with Catholic

Exhibit 2

Stage 2 Network: Planning Phase



Key: s=student, cs=church staff, cl=clergy, trp=TRP staff, a=agency representative, sp=school principle, cf=church family representative, f=faculty

Charities, had been chairing the new curriculum subcommittee. She became a regular steering committee member and project designer. She would eventually reposition her work site with Catholic Charities into Pilsen to begin providing more community-based services in cooperation with Esperanza Familiar.

Reilly described the students as the project's "engine" (Lieber, 1997). Of all the steering committee members, the students spent the most time moving the project forward between the committee's monthly meetings. They compiled profiles of foundations. They gathered samples of curricula from other family support programs in the United States. One student used a family contact with a local private foundation to help secure one of Esperanza Familiar's first grants. She also went with Reverend Dahm and Reilly to speak with public school principals about their possible interest in having Esperanza Familiar run classes and provide services in their buildings.

The work of the graduate interns had evolved as well. Their emphasis on community assessment and research had changed to an emphasis on fund development, proposal writing, community organizing (building beginning networks in the parish and school sites), curriculum design, and, for one student with an interest in direct service, the provision of counseling to a small number of youth. While no longer supervising the intern team, Weagant continued to encourage the students to write about the project in their planning and management seminars at the College. Kordesh, who had considerable experience as a planner in designing community-based, family support programs, provided consultation directly to the committee as well as to the students.

Exhibit 2 depicts the larger network, the more central role as "engine" played by the student team and the new sites under cultivation during the planning phase. Successful fund development initiated in this phase would result in changes that would further centralize the network, and intensify (or add to the density of) the relationships between the steering committee, the College, the Great Cities program at UIC, and the parish and school sites.

While not discussed in such terms, matters related to coordination, symmetry, and domain consensus were being worked out at this stage through the drafting of funding proposals. There were two types of funding proposals being prepared simultaneously, with Salgado taking the lead on one type and Kordesh on the other. Various drafts of each type were reviewed regularly and critiqued at steering committee meetings.

One type of proposal sought funds for TRP alone, in particular for staff for the new Esperanza Familiar project. A second type of proposal—euphemistically referred to by Kordesh, Salgado, and Susana Vasquez, TRP's development director, as the "mama" proposal—was to be used to seek funds for the entire College-TRP partnership. The steering committee's strategy was to move quickly on the first type in order to start the project as soon as practical, and to not let the longer development of the larger "mama" proposal delay the smaller submissions.

Working on a joint proposal was especially helpful in clarifying matters of coordination, symmetry, and domain consensus within the growing Stage 2 network. The joint proposal described the partnership's objectives under three main goals: research, graduate education, and service to families through Esperanza Familiar itself. It identified, for instance, how graduate students would allocate their time across the three areas. The joint proposal identified communication channels between the College and the steering committee, and discussed how the project would generate case material for use in specific College seminars. It differentiated the directions research would take: a case study of the project and an evaluation of Esperanza Familiar's classes, groups, and counseling efforts.

While the joint proposal was not submitted in its entirety to one funder, writing it and having it debated by the steering committee did help clarify during this critical planning stage how the fuller network would function. It began to establish domain consensus by identifying the research, university-based education, and community-based education that would take place. It began to legitimize the exchanges of information among these domains, ensuring that the symmetry among the domains would be reasonably strong. For instance, TRP staff and parish clergy understood that the project's experiences would be used in classes and in research that would be disseminated among other schools of social work. Participants from TRP, the parishes, and the university saw how the partnership could grow into a full-fledged, multisite, diversified network, grounded in the fundamental purpose of learning.

Stage 3 Network: February 1998–December 1998, The Implementation Phase

The project shifted from the planning phase to the implementation phase when Melenne Mosquera assumed the new position of *Esperanza Familiar* coordinator in January 1998. After an orientation period in January, she began work in earnest in February, preparing to open classes for families at parish and school sites. Because of the readiness at two of the parishes—St. Adalbert's and St. Procopius—the first classes commenced in spring 1998. Hilda Mendez, one of the graduate interns, helped facilitate the classes and also led workshop sessions for children whose parents were taking the classes. Under the supervision of Barbara Wickell, a College faculty member, Mendez also provided counseling to several families.

At the same time, Kordesh expanded his use of the project in the classroom. During the spring 1998 semester he made the project one of the focuses of his graduate and undergraduate seminars in *Community Theory and Practice*. Five undergraduates and two graduate students conducted independent research on Pilsen, interviewing TRP personnel as primary sources. Salgado and Reilly each delivered lectures. Kordesh lectured on the similarity between TRP's diverse, community-based initiatives and those of the turn-of-the-century Hull House. One of the undergraduates, Marisela Espinosa, wrote her research paper on the tax increment financing proposals for the economic development of Pilsen, an issue in which UIC itself had a considerable stake. Another student, Sonia Carrera, a resident of Pilsen, studied the history of the conflict between UIC and some Pilsen organizations over the potential impacts of UIC's south campus expansion.

Exhibit 3 depicts how diversified and yet, how centralized the network had become. New classes had formed at the parish sites. Parents from the sites began attending steering committee meetings as well. The learning network began extending into the homes of families participating in classes. *Esperanza Familiar*'s curriculum requires that parents do homework: they track their own interactions with family members for examples of anger, conflict, and other behaviors. They make lists of their observations for use in classroom discussion. This triggers conversation at home among other family members about how the family manages tension.

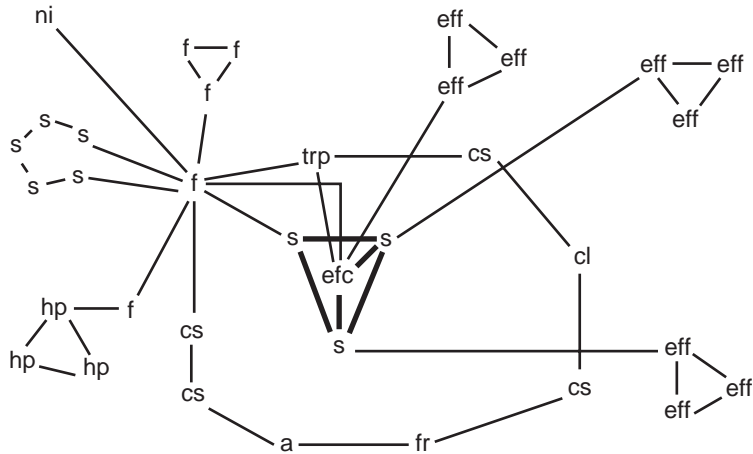
Mosquera, the students who helped facilitate the sessions, and parent representatives related these experiences (while protecting the anonymity of individual families) to the steering committee for use in proposal development, evaluation, and recruiting of new sites. Graduate students drew on their experiences with families in their research papers. Mendez, for instance, used her counseling experience with one family for her research paper in *Advanced Family Practice*.

In fall 1998 a new domain of the network was forming. The Department of Family Medicine at UIC had acquired funding from the Federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for a project that would train its residents in community medicine in a culturally competent medical practice. The funding allowed the department to contract a portion of Kordesh’s time as a “community relations specialist,” linking Family Medicine and Esperanza Familiar. Moreover, the grant would eventually support hiring community health liaisons—parents living in Pilsen and recruited through Esperanza Familiar—to serve as personal guides for medical residents into Pilsen.

Participants in Family Medicine’s project would become part of the social learning network. Esperanza Familiar would, in effect, serve as the channel through which clinicians would learn about Mexican-American culture and traditional health practices. They would also be invited by Esperanza Familiar staff to serve as resource persons at Esperanza Familiar’s classes, helping to encourage the use by families of family medical services, and in turn, helping medical practitioners learn more about their Hispanic clientele.

Exhibit 3

Stage 3 Network: Implementation Phase



Key: s=student, cs=church staff, cl=clergy, trp=TRP staff, a=agency representative, eff=Esperanza Familiar family, efc=Esperanza Familiar coordinator, hp=health practitioner, ni=Neighborhood Initiative coordinator, fr=family representative, f=faculty

The expanding size and complexity of the network were triggering changes in density and centrality. As of December 1998 the density within the network was highest at the parish sites, not within the steering committee. This change was due in part to the intensive activity generated by the classes and in part to Mosquera’s managerial approach. Mosquera, the project’s first full-time director, was assuming more leadership over the direction and content of the program, and was seeking more influence over the agenda of the steering committee. As a result, the activity within the steering committee diminished somewhat, whereas at the parish sites it intensified.

Clearly, and understandably from a management standpoint, the network became more centralized around Mosquera. This centralization was especially evident in the domains in the community where counseling was delivered and where classes were held for families. However, with respect to the full network of the university-community partnership, a second center appeared to be emerging around Kordesh's position of faculty liaison to the project.

The faculty liaison became a "bridging" position between the center at TRP and the College. While serving this bridging role, the faculty liaison has become a secondary center within the social learning network.

Despite the central roles played by the bridging and managerial positions, coordination still depended upon the steering committee. In fact, given the complexity of the various networks and the multiplicity of domains that are emerging, the steering committee will likely need to serve permanently as a forum through which the various interests represented by these domains can be integrated. In addition to the steering committee, those domains included clusters of participants at three parish sites, several university seminars, and the emerging health initiative involving Family Medicine. Establishing symmetry among those domains would remain important to keep in balance the research, teaching, and service objectives of the partnership. Moreover, symmetry would be important in maintaining a proper learning atmosphere in which all participants would continue to recognize that they have knowledge to share and knowledge to gain.

Implications for the Study and Practice of Intentional Social Network Building

Each of the stages of the project—assessment, planning and implementation—required changes in the social learning network. The network grew as *Esperanza Familiar* moved from the assessment stage into the planning and implementation stages. The point of highest density shifted from the steering committee to the parish sites where classes were held. Centrality shifted as well as the faculty liaison role became a go-between for the project and university units. Moreover, during implementation the project became much more centralized around one position—the new director position—and less so around the steering committee. The challenges of coordinating the network became more complex as the size expanded and as new domains formed.

The capacity for coordination was aided by the steadfast presence of the steering committee. Except for a brief period when the director was becoming acclimated to the setting, the steering committee met at least monthly and reviewed issues germane to various domains in the network. It considered research findings, it examined program models, it dealt with practical matters of family recruitment, it reviewed grant proposals, it considered new potential partnerships, and it interviewed candidates for the new director position. It provided continuity within the network and stimulated multidirectional learning even as the network was evolving rapidly. The steering committee was in fact the unit in the network most conscious of itself as a network-building entity.

The steering committee had set out from the beginning to create the project systematically, following the process of assessment, planning, and implementation. That the project grew through this sequence greatly aided its capacity to also build a strong network. It also made a useful network analysis more possible.

When integrated in real practice with the project development cycle, network analysis can aid in the applied study of social networks. A complex partnership such as *Esperanza*

Familiar requires an analytical framework that recognizes its unique characteristics. Esperanza Familiar is not a program in the conventional sense. It is not a community, nor is it an organization. It is not merely a research project. Yet, it clearly is an integrated and increasingly self-conscious social entity. It is not led by one person, although it depends on the capacities of various individuals to exercise sound leadership. Learning takes place in varied settings, but around a shared concern. Esperanza Familiar possesses some traits that are similar to the traits of other organizational types. Yet, because it is a network, learning about itself is facilitated by network analysis.

University-Community Partnerships as Social Learning Networks

As a university-community partnership, Esperanza Familiar stimulates at least five types of learning: classroom learning at the university, scholarly learning through faculty research, learning by parents through Esperanza Familiar's own classes, learning by TRP staff about methods of family practice, and learning by various participants about building a network.

This learning takes place in the network's varied domains: university teaching, university research, and community-based practice. Each of these domains is really a diverse mix of subdomains with its own language, culture, disciplinary focus, and politics. Maintaining symmetry among these domains is one of the challenges facing this partnership. Maintaining a capacity to coordinate the various domains requires sensitivity to their various characteristics. It also requires a capacity to translate knowledge when it moves from one domain to the next.

Let us consider first the diversity of the domains. During the project's first 2 years, the university teaching domain was situated primarily in the community theory and practice seminar in the Jane Addams College of Social Work. The seminar used literature mainly from the social sciences and considered a variety of topics, only some of which focused directly on working with Latino families in an older, urban neighborhood. In fact, most of the students in the seminar were not serving internships in Pilsen.

The learning in this classroom domain that was fed by Esperanza Familiar blended with the seminar's broader subject matter. Esperanza Familiar became the live case in community practice discussed most frequently by all students in the seminar, whether or not they were serving internships at TRP. It also created the best opportunity for students who were serving internships with TRP to relate their experiences to research literature in community theory.

The seminar at the university constituted quite a different domain from the classes with parents at the parishes in Pilsen. Many of the parents were Mexican immigrants who spoke Spanish as their first language. Their subject matter was experiential, rather than research-based. Unlike the university students, the parents didn't produce papers, but they did create products that expressed their views of themselves, their families, and communities. For instance, parents in several seminars fashioned artistic collages in the forms of facial masks that were meant to symbolize their identities as individuals and as family members.

In addition to the two types of classes, a third domain was constituted by faculty who conduct research on university-community partnerships, community organization, and the Latino community. Esperanza Familiar has been the subject of several faculty forums

sponsored by the Great Cities Institute at UIC. In these settings, the concerns have been more about the implications for broader knowledge development and less about specific practice methods or techniques for resolving particular family quandaries.

The importance of symmetry among the domains of a social learning network is illustrated by these examples. What the TRP interns learn in community theory can be of use as they facilitate the classes with parents. What they learn from working with Mexican-American parents in the classes makes them more able to enrich class discussions in community theory. Symmetry among the domains is necessary to ensure that each is making its unique contribution to *Esperanza Familiar*, even though at any particular time the activities within a domain are focused on its own issues, communicated in the domain's own language, and structured by its own disciplinary bias.

How is symmetry maintained among such diverse domains? Two factors in particular affect symmetry: the relative influence of TRP and the university over the design and decisionmaking in the partnership, and the capacity for translation of knowledge from one domain to the next. TRP leaders were quite insistent at the outset of the project that the terms defining "who would get what" from the partnership would be laid out clearly. The interest of the students in getting a high-quality internship experience, the interest of faculty in opportunities for research, and the interests of TRP and the churches in expanding their services for families were discussed in a forthright manner. Moreover, it was agreed that learning would be a two-way process in which faculty and students from the university would share their knowledge but act in an open and respectful way with community members. Decisionmaking around the project would be a joint process of deliberation, mediated through the steering committee.

TRP leaders were forthright in stating that they "didn't want to be studied" as if they were subjects in a social laboratory. While they accepted the need for faculty to conduct research and publish in broader forums, research would need to be of use to the community. In other words, learning would be a mutual process, and its mutuality would be protected by shared influence among and within the different domains.

Symmetry also depended on ensuring that the knowledge generated in one domain is translatable for use in another domain. For instance, when faculty and students presented research literature in the assessment phase of the project, they drew from evaluations and case studies of family support programs in many settings in the United States. Some of the literature was too broad in scope for direct, practical application to *Esperanza Familiar*. Some of it was not directly relevant to working with Latino families. That which was directly applicable needed to be explained in terms which made the usefulness clear. Presenters (students and faculty) had to know enough about the culture of families in Pilsen and even the organization of Catholic parishes to cull from research what would be useful.

In order for *Esperanza Familiar* to impact the curriculum in the College, the issues and perspectives expressed by parents in the Spanish-language classes needed to be communicated in the English-speaking university classroom. A seminar session on family-based community development at the university could be enriched by students who had helped facilitate classes with families in Pilsen in which their problems with immigration, the recruitment of young children by gangs, or the unresponsiveness of schools had been the topics.

Parents in the classes not only spoke a different language, they spoke with the point-of-view of a culture steeped in distinctive traditions and religious beliefs. Several lively discussions in the university seminars dealt with the importance of culturally competent

practice. It was pointed out by students, guests from Pilsen, and faculty that religious faith and culture were deeply intertwined in the lives of Mexican-American families. Yet, expressing faith language felt awkward to students in the secular university setting. Discussing the social and political significance of religious holidays, such as the Feast of The Virgin of Guadalupe, created some discomfort among students steeped in the secular, scientific orientations of graduate school. It was acknowledged, however, that without a working understanding of religious faith, culturally competent practice with such families would not be possible.

Furthering Research on Social Learning Networks and Family Empowerment

How can studying Esperanza Familiar (and other university-community partnerships with similar goals) as a social learning network strengthen the capacity of university-community partnerships to empower families? A social network perspective would focus on the access of families to the network's center, the influence of families in the network's most important domains and the density of family participation within those domains.

Making the network an empowering setting for families would be very congruent with the curriculum for parents devised by TRP staff and student interns. That curriculum drew heavily on the educative, reflective approach advocated by Paulo Friere in his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). It also drew from current family support approaches utilized by other successful agencies that serve Latino families.²

To illustrate the reflection encouraged by the seminars, parents were asked to do homework. Between classes, they monitored their own reactions to family events, such as those that trigger conflict. For instance, they took notes on their responses to their children's misbehavior and contemplated where they themselves might have learned such responses. Often the sources turned out to be their own childhood experiences. They might have been unconsciously modeling hurtful tactics they themselves experienced in schools, in their villages, or in their own families. They were encouraged to consider the deeper, societal sources of violence in their own lives and in the lives of their children. Having exposed such sources, they were better able to choose responses that would break the chain of learned violence inherited unconsciously from the past.

Through sharing these experiences and observations, parents learned from each other. They taught each other. Some parents later entered training to become facilitators themselves. Staff facilitators learned from them about the causes of problems faced by Pilsen's families. They carried this learning into the steering committee's deliberations. It eventually fed the entire network.

The ultimate success of Esperanza Familiar will depend on the durability of this learning after families complete the classes. There is good reason to believe that for many families the learning will endure. It will do so because Esperanza Familiar is nested in TRP and the churches that formed it. Esperanza Familiar will help families join block clubs, small faith communities, and other family-based institutions that are part of TRP's larger social network.

Thinking beyond Esperanza Familiar, future research into those social learning networks that aim to strengthen families must delve into the access of families to the networks' steering centers where assumptions are made about what families want and need. What

cultural and political factors might block this access, allowing an imbalance of power to emerge between families and professionals? In particular, how can the research methods and curricula employed by university faculty and students affect the access of families to the centers of social learning networks?

Moreover, what level of density must families achieve in university-community learning networks in order to ensure that their culture is respected and their traditions are known? What cultural and political factors might encourage or impede this density? How can research be conducted in such a way that it is encouraged?

Conclusion

By integrating social network analysis with the stages of project development, this article has sought to illuminate research questions and practical methods for intentionally building social networks. Moreover, by tracing the creation of Esperanza Familiar in Chicago's Pilsen community, it applied this illumination to an understanding of university-community partnerships. Network analysis can be a useful tool in the creation and study of balanced, mutually satisfying, and durable relationships among such diverse participants as university faculty, graduate students, community organization staff, clergy, and families.

Neither communities nor organizations, in most cases, university-community partnerships require unique analytical concepts that can aid in their successful formation. The social learning network is an apt lens through which to study and design them.

Author

Richard S. Kordesh, Ph.D., is a research assistant professor, Department of Family Medicine, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). He assists the department in the design of community-oriented research and teaching strategies. From 1996–99 he was a lecturer in Community Development and Family Policy, Jane Addams College of Social Work, UIC, where he served as faculty coordinator of the project described herein.

Notes

1. My main sources for the description of Esperanza Familiar's creation were more than 50 meetings as a participant-observer with the steering committee, students, and staff. The steering committee kept detailed minutes and produced other written summary materials detailing its discussions on many aspects of Esperanza Familiar. I also benefited from conversations with Michael Lieber, professor of anthropology at UIC, who also conducts evaluations for the Great Cities Institute. Lieber and his student have also been tracking Esperanza Familiar's progress, and they too must be recognized as important members of this project's learning network.
2. Dahm, Kordesh, Mosquera, Salgado, Joseph Sloan (a graduate intern from the College), and Dolores Tapia (a staff member at St. Pius church) delivered a seminar on Esperanza Familiar as a faith-based, family empowerment initiative at the Family Resource Coalition (FRC) of America's national conference in May 1998. Joining FRC and becoming involved in its network of family resource programs was part of the steering committee's strategy to become linked with the national family support field.

References

- Friere, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.
- Hardcastle, David A., Stanley Wenocur, and Patricia B. Powers. 1997. *Community Practice: Theories and Skills for Social Workers*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hurtig, Janise. 1996. "Pilsen: Parishes and Churches in a Mexican-American Neighborhood," in *Religious Organizations and Structural Change in Metropolitan Chicago: The Research Report of the Religion in America Program*, Lowell Livezey, ed. Chicago, IL: Office of Social Science Research, University of Illinois at Chicago, pp.139–174.
- Knoke, David, and James H. Kuklinski. 1982. *Network Analysis. Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences*, #28. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kordesh, Richard S. 1995. *Irony and Hope in the Emerging Family Policies: A Case for Family Empowerment Associations*. University Park, PA: Institute for Policy Research and Evaluation, Pennsylvania State University.
- Lieber, Michael. 1997. Unpublished evaluation report on UIC neighborhood initiatives. Chicago, IL: Great Cities Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago.
- Murty, Susan A. 1998. "Network Analysis as a Research Methodology for Community Practice," in *Research Strategies for Community Practice*, Ray H. MacNair, ed. New York, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc., pp. 21–46.
- Scott, John. 1991. *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook*. London: Sage Publications.