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To cite this article: Barbara Pierce, Lisa E. McGuire & Patricia Howes (2015) Ready, Set, Go ... Again: Renewing an Academy–Agency Child Welfare Partnership, Journal of Social Work Education, 51:sup2, S239-S251

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2015.1072424>



Published online: 13 Oct 2015.



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Ready, Set, Go . . . Again: Renewing an Academy–Agency Child Welfare Partnership

Barbara Pierce, Lisa E. McGuire, and Patricia Howes

This article presents a case study of the renewed partnership between a midwestern public child welfare agency and a midwestern university school of social work. The partnership, which includes educating BSW and MSW students, preparing frontline child welfare case managers, and providing leadership training for supervisors and managers, demonstrates relational capital, relational embeddedness, and transparency, all of which are criteria for trust and strong partnerships. We discuss the unique development of collaborative relationships through the history of the partnership. This study provides an exemplar of how the academy and the agency communities can inform each other to enhance the well-being of children and families.

Maintaining a strong relationship between the practice and academic communities is and must remain one of the vital links in the development of professional social work. From its inception, social work as a profession took shape organically from within the larger community as a response to poverty and need (Trattner, 1998). In providing a finer, analytical edge to that foundational relationship, Addams and Richmond, each in very different ways, emphasized the importance of tacit and explicit learning for workers to attain sufficient knowledge and skill to do social work effectively (Franklin, 1986). Over the years, however, universities have tended to provide more explicit knowledge while the tacit or experiential knowledge came to social work students via their field experience. While that informal arrangement remains largely true today, it overlooks the importance of partnerships and more formal linkages between the practice and university communities, particularly now that people in both communities have come to realize the importance of the other.

In recognition of the importance of the link between the classroom and the field, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) named field education as the signature pedagogy, which has put field experience at the center of learning (CSWE, 2008). Although individual schools of social work have working relationships with multiple agencies in their communities as part of the field education process, many of these relationships fall far short of formal partnerships. One

Accepted: June 2015

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model of a formalized partnership, structured to make linkages between universities and the practice community, does exist in the form of Title IV-E child welfare partnerships. However, not all partnerships are created equal, and achieving a truly collaborative partnership may be challenging. This article presents a case study consistent with the method Stake (2005) has established that allows the analysis of experiential knowledge of a specific historical context, specific activities within that context, and anything uncommon that affects either context or activities. The findings of this case study demonstrate how a new partnership between a public child welfare agency and a university school of social work can emerge from an earlier, failed attempt and have a positive impact on workforce retention and the creation of a leadership pipeline in one midwestern state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1980 states began to use Title IV-E, which was created by the Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act, as a funding mechanism to provide scholarships to students to study child welfare (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Zlotnik, 2003b). In return, these same students are obligated to pay back in the form of a number of years of service to the public child welfare agency. What began as a funding mechanism has, in some cases, evolved practically into strong education and training partnerships between universities and state child welfare agencies (Briar, Hanson, & Harris, 1992; Zlotnik, 1997, 2003a). The strength of this partnership model rests on the fact that it ensures a steady stream of educated professional social workers to enter child welfare at the BSW and MSW levels. These social workers tend to be retained longer than non-social-work educated workers and have better outcomes for the children and families in their care (Ellett, Ellett, Ellis, & Lerner, 2009; Gansle & Ellett, 2003; Strolin, McCarthy, & Caringi, 2006).

There is, however, a wide diversity in the structure of these Title IV-E partnerships. Rheaume, Collins, and Amodeo (2011) interviewed 60 participants from across the United States regarding their perspectives on Title IV-E partnerships. They found that state partnerships varied in scope and purpose but that most used the partnerships for stipends for students. Others used Title IV-E partnerships for training workers for either preservice or ongoing education. While they found that partnerships reported enhanced communication and positive relationships between partners, they did not actually identify the building blocks of a strong partnership.

When public child welfare agencies and universities began to form partnerships to educate students, they did so in an attempt to reprofessionalize the public child welfare system and, by that step, to stem the tide of rising turnover rates. But building strong partnerships is no easy task even under the best of circumstances. In that respect, public child welfare remains challenging on many levels, and is itself sometimes challenged for reasons beyond its control. High-profile cases of child abuse or neglect, for instance, can taint child welfare in the public mind. Add to that the sometimes capricious nature of taxpayer funding, and the system as a whole must live with stresses that go beyond the typical conflicts that turf or professional ideology can generate. Although those in public child welfare may not be able to control all the extraneous variables that impinge on the field, they can put their own house in order. To that end, the literature from the business and sociology disciplines, which study and value partnership alliances, can provide new insights to social work about creating and maintaining strong internal relationships. This

body of literature makes clear that partnerships must have relational capital, transparency, and embeddedness (all defined later) to be strong (Becerra, Lunnan, & Huemer, 2008) because, when combined, these three factors produce the trust necessary for partnerships to thrive. *Trust*, as used here, signifies the mutual and complementary respect partners in an organizational structure have for its component units to perform work with integrity and without undue interference (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). The absence of trust, by contrast, tends to erode partnerships because explicit and implicit information sharing invariably will deteriorate. In partnerships explicit and implicit or tacit information is shared. According to Becerra et al. (2008), the more tacit information shared, experiential knowledge or that which is learned by doing (Polanyi, 1967), the stronger the partnership becomes. In their study, Becerra et al. (2008) surveyed CEOs from 65 firms in Norway, including some from the public sector, and discovered that while transfer of explicit knowledge between partners created a measure of risk, transfer of tacit knowledge was deemed a measure of trustworthiness that, in turn, figured significantly in the success of the partnership. Much of this learning is not articulated and can include the feeling that one is doing something in a field, which also includes taking the agency culture into account (Bourdieu, 1990). Through a different lens, a partnership develops its own habitus, which tends to make it stronger. *Habitus*, according to Bourdieu (1990), depends on mental or cognitive structures people use to adapt to their social worlds. Ritzer (2000) has stated that Bourdieu believes people have a series of internalized schemes through which they perceive and understand. Developing a partnership involves the ability to join the explicit knowledge (procedures, joint knowledge, etc.) with the internalized schemes or tacit knowledge learned by actually working together. By wedding these elements successfully, partnerships have a greater chance of succeeding through the development of human relationships.

All partnerships depend on human relationships; however, stronger partnerships tap into the relational capital of their member partners in ways that weaker partnerships do not. *Relational capital* is defined as the productive resources that follow from the invested relationships that agencies and the people they work with cultivate to expand their enterprise. These personal relationships, in turn, are built on a foundation of *transparency*, which is defined as that type of communication and accountability that opens channels for the transfer of tacit, privately held knowledge (including processes and communications) between agencies (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014). According to Becerra et al. (2008), the greater the sharing of tacit knowledge, the stronger the trust and, by extension, the partnership.

The third element in fostering the trust necessary for strong partnerships is relational embeddedness. Simply put, this is the degree of closeness in relationships (Uzzi & Lancaster, 2003), so that the greater this *embeddedness*—the capacity of being vested in others—the greater the trust. Embeddedness may occur from a physical and an organizational proximity, which means people can be embedded in a physical space, and processes can be embedded or codified within a work group. As complementary organizational elements, then, relational capital, transparency, and relational embeddedness create the synergy that strengthens partnerships.

Other factors in the literature appear to be important as well. De La Garza and Kuri (2014) studied partnerships between universities and urban literacy programs. They concluded that strong partnerships grow from equal voice and mutual benefits. In this case, equal voice inheres in transparency and embeddedness while mutual benefits are implicit in relational capital. In the same vein, Phillips, Gregory, and Nelson (2003) believe that evaluative efforts of partnerships can provide support for efforts to grow as a collaborative unit. Important in any partnership are

the needs and values of each member of the partnership as well as the willingness to work for common goals (Phillips et al., 2003). For public child welfare agencies, these are mandated by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and are already well established: safety, permanency, and the well-being of children and families (Adoption and Safe Families Act, 1997). Although issues such as retention and secondary stress in the workplace are common themes for child welfare partnerships to address (Gansle & Ellett, 2003; Ellett, Ellett, Ellis, and Lerner, 2009; Strolin et al., 2006), Title IV-E partnerships ultimately strive to improve safety, permanency, and well-being.

The remainder of this study focuses on how the synergy of relational capital, transparency, and embeddedness have rehabilitated and transformed an agency-university partnership in one midwestern state. Further, discussion of the evaluation process of partnership programs performed by university faculty demonstrates that positive change can occur when partners, simply put, trust each other and work together.

METHOD

This study uses the case study method (Stake, 2005) to tell the story of two partnerships: one failed and one thriving. Authors McGuire and Howes who worked in both partnerships have supplied and detailed the operational data for this case study. Case study methodology provides a useful instrument for exploring discrete and complex situations that lend themselves to conceptualizing a process, here, the development of strong partnerships (Stake, 2005). With its boundaries established, the case study in question examines the historical context between a state child welfare agency and the university school of social work. From this context an idea of singular importance emerges: how trust develops through relationships and collaborative enterprise to enhance the preparation for public child welfare and ultimately improves services to children and families throughout the state.

DATA ANALYSIS

The following data, which detail the story of the development of the current partnership, were drawn from the observations and lived experience of authors McGuire and Howes who worked in the failed and successful partnership. These data were categorized into the themes of relational capital, transparency and evaluation, and relational embeddedness to explain the erosion of trust in the failed partnership and its restoration in the thriving one.

RESULTS: EXEMPLAR

The aim of this exemplar is to explain the development of the new partnership using the concepts of relational capital, relational embeddedness, and transparency to understand the growth of trust, which leads to the flow of tacit knowledge between the university and the child welfare agency to form the new partnership. The partnership consists of a major public university school of social work and a public child welfare agency. The major programs of this



FIGURE 1 University-agency partnership.

partnership as it exists today are education of BSW and MSW scholars, training of agency caseworkers, training of supervisors and executive leadership, and training of resource and foster parents as well as a practice support team. A total of 78 employees work full-time in partnership activities. This number does not include faculty who work with the partnership for evaluation purposes or as curriculum experts (see [Figure 1](#)).

History of the Failed Partnership

In the 1980s a midwestern state child welfare agency entered into a contractual agreement with a midwestern state university to collaboratively develop and deliver training for child welfare workers. Although this partnership stayed strong for 10 years, it ended as key employees left their positions and consensus on the means to realize improved services became blurred. Historical knowledge, that is, information about the origins and process of the collaboration, broke down, and a growing gulf between the two entities formed. In this wake, differences of opinion regarding practice became difficult to negotiate. There never was relational embeddedness as the university was regularly regarded as merely another contractor working for the agency. Without a clear mission or mutual vision and a lack of a day-to-day work agenda, trust could not develop, and it did not.

Relational capital, likewise, never grew as turnover of staff hampered relationship building. Communication between the two sides also grew difficult, and perceived power differentials were so great that eventually the contractual agreement ended (Lippold & Howes, 2013). As Becerra et al. (2008) found in their study, trust between alliance or partnership members is crucial to the success of partnerships. With the absence of that trust, the alliance between the state agency and university ended—badly—not for the want of procedural steps such as accountability checkpoints but because the partnership culture never had a chance to grow.

Development of Relational Capital

Ten years later, however, the two entities, each under renewed leadership, sought to develop a Title IV-E program to encourage current agency employees to earn their MSW while maintaining employment at the state agency. It is important to note that this process did not begin with any grand vision for developing a partnership. Rather, the agency was interested in becoming an accredited public child welfare program and was looking for a vehicle to add more master-level supervisors to its workforce. To achieve this, the agency decided to fund a program to send existing agency personnel back to school. The agency saw the MSW program as a tool to increase the leadership skills of promising agency employees as well as meet the requirements of the accreditation process. The students were required to pay back this financial support in work time at the public child welfare agency.

At the outset trust remained low because, in part, the agency had very few social-work-educated employees, and thus its culture did not value social work knowledge. Agency administrators were also concerned that the student employees would leave the agency without fulfilling their employment commitments thereby wasting taxpayer resources. However, feedback from the earliest two cohorts of students showed that their participation in the MSW program had, in fact, increased their commitment to child welfare and allowed them to imagine a career ladder within the agency that they had not considered before. It also helped them identify areas where they might be able to make a positive contribution within the agency, benefitting agency as well as children and families alike (McGuire & Lay, 2007). As it became apparent that these students were not leaving the agency for better jobs elsewhere, relational capital began to develop.

Unfortunately, the development of relational capital did not occur along a straight trajectory: The path was often one step forward and two steps back. Much of the challenge was not unexpected in a large state agency. Again, constant turnover of key leadership personnel meant frequently needing to start the relationship development process over.

While trust was still low initially, the university needed to repeatedly demonstrate to the agency that it would be a responsible partner. The university partner had to spend time during the financial contractual negotiation demonstrating, for example, that it was not charging fees to agency students that were not charged to other students, or confirming that special activities the agency wanted the university to engage in for their students (for example, developing a distance education program from scratch) were things that were already available to others for free. As agency administrators were satisfied that the financial arrangements for its employees' education were sound, they became more comfortable with the university as a partner.

Improvements in relational capital came about in two ways, one internal and the other external. The internal improvement was when students from the original cohorts were promoted into higher level management positions; by their own account, they had reached a critical mass that enabled them to effect changes in the larger system (McGuire, Howes, Murphy-Nugen, & George, 2011). And the external improvement was when political changes in the state led to the creation of a stand-alone child welfare agency, with its head reporting directly to the governor. At that point in 2006, the agency head, who recognized the untapped capital in the school of social work, reached out to the dean of the school re-form child welfare training in the state. The agency head was able to remain in his position for more than 7 years (highly unusual for an administrator in public child welfare), which allowed significant relational capital to develop

between these two leaders. Clear and cordial working relationships were energized by the shared vision of doing what was best for children and families. A commitment to develop a more significant partnership was a result of their relationship. Subsequently, staff members from both entities drew up a blueprint. They worked deliberately to craft a partnership and to create parallel work groups for all aspects of the partnership. In this way, they planned for a joining of forces in a way that would go beyond the previous attempt at a partnership and be sustainable beyond any changes in leadership on either side of the work (Lippold & Howes, 2013). This new relationship was not just an agency-contractor one but now was taking steps to be equal partners. The relational capital of the leadership was modeled in the environment and set the tone for the work that would follow within the partnership. At the operational level, relational embeddedness grew, as did transparency.

As comfort and trust increased, the agency determined that it wanted to add BSW child welfare education to the programming of the partnership. As was the practice in the successful MSW child welfare education program, this new BSW scholar program required a work pay-back period. University and agency personnel jointly developed a curriculum that allowed students from all of the public universities in the state (as sub-contractors) to participate and graduate students who had completed the equivalent of the agency's pre-service training. These new employees were able to move quickly into the workforce. As expected, the agency embraced this change and the students were able to successfully complete the program and make smooth transitions into their employment with the agency.

Relational Embeddedness

Partnership members made deliberate efforts to start looking for opportunities to increase relational embeddedness. This was limited at first, but started in earnest in the curriculum development process, particularly in the BSW stipend program. The two child welfare courses taken by the stipend students and the learning activities incorporated into their field experience were taken directly from the pre-service training provided to typical new child welfare case workers. This curriculum included using the same readings, small group activities, videos, and transfer of learning activities. This curriculum development process served to increase the trust that the agency had in the university itself: that is, it recognized that the latter was preparing students every bit as well for the job as the agency did with other new hires. Further, this same curriculum development process was put into place in all BSW programs across the state that had elected to work with the partnership. The extension of sub-contracts to other BSW programs extended the participation opportunity for students across the state and served as a recruitment opportunity for the agency statewide.

As the partnership saw success with the existing educational programs, university and agency leaders agreed to create a physically embedded partnership predicated upon equal voice. The partnership physically and organizationally joined the existing training unit of the agency with university resources in order to help meet the training needs of the agency as a whole (Lippold & Howes, 2013). This is the point in the process where relational embeddedness and transparency could really be nurtured. Initially there were conversations about colocating the entire training units from both entities; however, that turned out to be unmanageable, given the constraints of both organizations involved. In the end, both organizations established external training locations where classrooms and workspaces could be

shared. Given that the trainers are all full-time, they spend the bulk of their time either in the classroom or preparing for the classroom. Trainers are assigned to train based on their expertise, not the organization they work for. Consequently, trainers from each organization provide training together daily. In addition, trainers work together to prepare for upcoming training sessions in shared space available to them in both training locations, allowing daily, intensive collaborative work together.

The melding of the two entities produced a paradigm shift from individual separate entities to the new collective one—a partnership—and required individuals working in the partnership to begin to engage in partnership team thinking rather than separate university or agency thinking. As they became physically embedded, their daily and shared work produced shared processes and a shared way of working together, from writing curriculum to actually teaching it. These daily shared experiences initially involved explicit knowledge—how to write and teach curricula—but out of those shared experiences implicit processes developed, processes mostly unspoken yet important ways of working together that produce a workplace culture or habitus.

In 2007 the partnership began employing about half of the training staff members as university employees and the other half as state agency employees (Lippold & Howes, 2013). Today trainers call themselves *partnership trainers* rather than university trainers or agency trainers, and they work hard to make that qualifier meaningful. In addition to trainers, the university child welfare staff and faculty worked with the agency to develop curricula, establish classroom and online training, and put a comprehensive training registration and training evaluation process in place.

Formal use of the term partnership, participation of high-level personnel on both sides of the partnership, and the joint day-to-day work of training staff and senior-level personnel contribute to trust building, which has been essential to the development of the strong partnership that exists today. These three practices bring embeddedness into every level of the partnership. Position descriptions are jointly developed, and all hiring is conducted by joint hiring committees and interview processes. Training staff is equally distributed between the two entities, and a university and an agency trainer jointly facilitate training sessions. All decisions are made jointly and typically by consensus, although everyone understands that it is ultimately the state agency that is fiscally and legally responsible for all work products. Curriculum writers are primarily employed by the university but work with agency experts to make the material appropriate for the reality of the agency's work. A training registration and record-management system has been developed and is managed by the university but directly interfaces with the state's human resource information system to create an effective way for employees to see available training, complete training registration, and access an official transcript of training received (Lippold & Howes, 2013).

A true partnership for training has resulted; now explicit and tacit knowledge is shared in ways that have produced relational embeddedness, which has also enhanced relational capital. The deputy director for staff development works closely with the agency director; her counterpart at the university is the director of the child welfare education and training partnership who works closely with the dean of the school of social work. This day-to-day communication adds appreciably to relational capital. All four high-level personnel have extensive historical knowledge of the partnership and share a deep commitment to improving services for children and families.

Transparency and Evaluation

As relational capital and embeddedness grew, opportunities to develop transparency also developed. As trainers and curriculum writers work together, day-to-day communication and work processes are transparent. They function as one unit with shared explicit and implicit information. As they are embedded daily and have transparent work processes, they develop relational capital and trust. The four constructs of trust, relational capital, relational embeddedness, and transparency are mutually reinforcing within this unit. This is not to say that the proverbial road is without bumps. All workplaces have difficulties, but the partnership work teams develop coping strategies together to mitigate problems.

Evaluation of various programs also helps enhance transparency. University personnel manage the evaluation of the training program for current workers. The evaluation ranges from gathering feedback regarding satisfaction with the training workers receive to measurement of knowledge gained in training to assessment of the transfer of skills from the classroom to the field to measuring the impact of the training on children and families. Full reports with all the findings are created and distributed quarterly. This transparency in evaluation has allowed joint responses to negative feedback on trainers or curriculum and has allowed the partnership to make informed and timely decisions on management of trainers, adjustments to curricula, and changes to the training process itself (Lippold & Howes, 2013). Contingent upon findings, evaluation sometimes can erode trust. However, because there is high relational capital and high trust overall, partners are able to take evaluation results and work to improve programming.

The annual BSW graduate survey and the Child Welfare Management Innovations Institute survey are two examples of evaluations of programs that have resulted in quality improvements. Rather than eroding trust, these two evaluations actually increase trust because of open communication and transparency. Each entity is vulnerable to scrutiny, but rather than stop the process, the partnership uses the scrutiny to enhance its performance. The BSW program evaluation, for example, compares students trained in the BSW child welfare programs supported across the state with new employees attending typical new worker training. This yearly comparison clearly demonstrates that BSW students feel more prepared for the job and 87% of them are retained past the 2-year payback period compared to only 57% of the new worker cohorts. In recognition of this evaluation, the agency has increased its support from originally training 36 students per year to now training 50 students per year. Further, this evaluation, part of which asks the respondents to assess their preparedness for practice, has been able to demonstrate that certain parts of preparation are better presented after a few months on the job as all of these new workers have some experience under their belts. Transparency through evaluation in this case has allowed better timing of certain aspects of education. Likewise, the executive leadership program evaluation has demonstrated that certain topics presented were not being learned or retained by participants, and the program was changed to meet the needs of the participants. Higher level management employees were able to see that their voice in evaluation translated into positive change for them within the leadership program. Their experience in this program is important because many of the agency's top management leaders participate in its programs and they have learned to be data driven and transparent in their own management styles. Overall, the partnership leadership is able to use data effectively to enhance all the programs within the partnership. This has become an embedded process within the partnership and is modeled for executive leadership trainees as well.

The success of the programs illustrates the successful efforts toward embeddedness and transparency that are the signatures of this partnership.

Embeddedness is reflected in all the ways that are cited for the rest of the partnership—decisions are made jointly, and curriculum is developed using experts from each side of the partnership. Transparency is evident in the ways evaluation feedback has been collected and used by the partnership.

Continued Growth of the Partnership

Training for resource and adoptive parents has been brought into the partnership structure. In addition, the partnership is currently developing a bachelor's-level child welfare certificate program as a way of identifying additional students in the university who may be interested in employment in the public child welfare agency. Faculty members brought new opportunities for cooperative work to the agency with a grant from the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. This grant enables the partnership to assist with different forms of MSW education for the agency as well as to begin an agency intervention initiative.

Ongoing Challenges

This partnership is not without its challenges. First, dividing the employees essentially down the middle with half paid by the agency and half by the university is a source of struggle for the employees. Since they each have different employers, they also have different pay scales and benefits. This causes conflicts that must be managed at times. There have been efforts to attempt equalization, but they are not always possible. Second, the partnership does have turnover. Just as the agency loses caseworkers, the partnership loses trainers and curriculum writers. When there are new hires into the partnership, there is an ongoing, conscious effort to nurture collaborative relationships, but it is not always a smooth process. It takes time to nurture relational capital and trust in a work group. Third, the partnership work group has become overworked and stressed because turnover in the state agency has increased, forcing the agency to hire new caseworkers more frequently, and they have to be trained. The trainers are now starting new worker training every 2 weeks, which is a stress on the system.

Communication is also an ongoing challenge. Given the different locations, organizational structures, and employment expectations for each partner (e.g., holidays and number of hours in the work week), it is imperative that everyone is in the loop about the details. It has proven to be a challenge to make sure that issues that come up and must be addressed in one location get quickly and accurately reported to the other half of the partnership. Hitting the balance between telling something to everyone who needs to know without overwhelming everyone with every single detail has turned out to be tricky. It does appear to be essential to maintaining relational capital, transparency, and trust.

DISCUSSION

The new iteration of the university-agency partnership embodies the principles of strong partnership as identified by Becerra et al. (2008). Despite ongoing challenges, results

demonstrate high levels of relational capital, relational embeddedness, and transparency through day-to-day work processes and intentional, transparent evaluation. These three constructs combine to allow implicit knowledge to be mutually developed and to flow freely between partners in the form of processes and work within the training unit and within the university course work for BSWs and MSWs. As Becerra et al. (2008) point out, the more that partners engage in sharing in the implicit process, the stronger the partnership. The exact order of occurrence of the constructs in this model of strong partnership is unclear. In fact, although we discuss each construct separately, it is apparent that their relationship is actually not linear but circular and synergistic. Further, all three then lead to enhanced trust, which allows development of inherent or tacit knowledge to be shared and for a new culture, or habitus, to be developed.

Although this case study is a specific example, there is reason to believe that others can use this process to develop effective and lasting partnerships. The lessons learned in this instance suggest that developing relational capital is the first step organization units should pursue if they are to be successful. At the level of state agencies, this first step may take a long time to develop, especially given the frequency of changing leadership in state bureaucracies. However, our experience suggests that until relational capital has been securely developed, it will be very difficult to move on to relational embeddedness or transparency.

It also became apparent that having a specific plan for relational embeddedness and transparency is as important to the success of the current partnership as are budgets or other technical documents. The original failed partnership discussed in this article had appropriate budgets, involved comprehensive planning, and expectations that were in place from the outset. However, in hindsight, that partnership seems to have suffered from the erosion of trust, accelerated by the lack of embeddedness and the loss of transparency.

This new relationship began when two strong leaders with high relational capital had a shared vision and determined the value of mutual respect and joint mission, which the directors of the new partnership equally embraced. Embeddedness is the norm, the way things are done in this state now, and the partnership is now a sustainable entity. It has developed a habitus, as Bourdieu (1990) describes, a series of internalized schemes through which the members perceive and understand their work culture. This partnership has developed into a field of practice unto itself in this state. The internalized schemes or implicit processes developed from the daily living and working together of a cohesive unit.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS CASE STUDY

Limitations of this case study include the inherent problems with any case study—it is only one example. Yet this partnership has been highly successful over the past 10 years and now provides consultation services to other partnerships in their initial stages. This partnership blueprint is replicable, as is this case study. What seems daunting, however, especially for small programs is the fiscal and human resource managements' ability to join as an equal partner with a state agency. This partnership employs almost 80 people to meet the training needs of this state. Most small schools would be unable to do this. However, it would certainly be possible in larger schools and more populous states. What is most certainly replicable for all is the use of the constructs presented in this study to enable stronger connections to form partnerships with state

agencies to provide BSW and MSW education and even technical assistance for the training units of their state agencies.

In this partnership there is no sense of complacency; it has not rested on its laurels. Multiple avenues of innovation are at work daily with new grants and initiatives emerging, particularly in the areas of recruiting and retaining the right student or worker and infusing and implementing trauma knowledge and initiatives to combat secondary stress. The most important aspect of this partnership, however, remains the shared commitment to build a stable and professional workforce, which strengthens services to children and families.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

While Title IV-E partnerships have existed for more than 3 decades, there is little research that actually demonstrates the variables needed for a strong partnership. Seeking information from the other social science literatures helps us see that the variables of relational capital and equal voice, embeddedness and tacit knowledge-sharing, and transparency by means of strong evaluation allow trust to develop and thrive, and may be one way of determining strength. Research to test these constructs in Title IV-E partnerships would serve in turn to increase knowledge in the academy and in practice. and it is under way in this partnership. The notion that creating a partnership actually creates a new entity—a field—that possesses habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) and opens a new body of research possibilities in child welfare is particularly interesting. Strong partnerships lead to trusted ways of solving practical problems by integrating the strengths of the academy and the agency to bolster the workforce, which can lead to better outcomes for children and families.

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