

# Esperanza Familiar: A University-Community Partnership in the Settlement House Tradition

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Jane Addams College of Social Work  
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A Great Cities Institute Working Paper



**UIC**





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### About the Author

Richard S. Kordesh teaches family policy and community development at the Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the faculty coordinator for the project described in this paper and he assists the College in the establishment of community-based, education and research projects.

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**The Settlement, then, is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city. It insists that these problems are not confined to any one portion of a city. It is an attempt to relieve, at the same time, the overaccumulation at the one end of society and the destitution at the other; but it assumes that this overaccumulation and destitution is most sorely felt in the things that pertain to social and educational privileges ... The one thing to be dreaded in the Settlement is that it lose its flexibility, its power of quick adaptation, its readiness to change its methods as its environment may demand. It must be open to conviction and must have a deep and abiding sense of tolerance. It should demand from its residents a scientific patience in the accumulation of facts and the steady holding of their sympathies as one of the best instruments for that accumulation.**

Jane Addams, from a lecture delivered to the  
Ethical Cultural Societies meeting,  
Plymouth, Massachusetts, 1892



# **Esperanza Familiar: A University-Community Partnership in the Settlement House Tradition**

## **Abstract**

This paper uses a network analysis to study the emergence of a communityuniversity partnership in Chicago's Pilsen community. It tracks the creation of Esperanza Familiar, a joint product of the Resurrection Project, a community development corporation in Pilsen and the Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago. The partnership has been supported by funding and technical assistance from the University of Illinois Neighborhoods Initiative. Seen as a social learning network, the partnership creates and disseminates knowledge to such diverse beneficiaries as faculty, graduate students, staff of the Resurrection Project and families in the neighborhood. This learning is reminiscent of the education-based approaches to community empowerment that were spawned by Jane Addams' Hull-House in Chicago in the early twentieth century.



## **Esperanza Familiar: A University-Community Partnership in the Settlement House Tradition**

### **Introduction**

Since Summer, 1996, supported by seed funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Oriented 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 education-based 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.

This paper describes the formation of Esperanza Familiar and then analyzes the social learning network that has formed around it. It examines a model of the network, following its evolution through the assessment, planning and implementation stages of the project. Using six variables common in network analysis - size, centrality, coordination, symmetry, domain consensus and density - it studies the prospects for the long-term durability of this partnership. It then argues that the families served by Esperanza Familiar will need to be involved in productive roles in critical domains of the network if the goals of strengthening families and integrating them into the community are to be achieved.

To facilitate the multi-directional learning referred to above, a network of persons representing each of the above perspectives has formed through the project's steering committee. Comprised of clergy, TRP staff, UIC faculty, UIC student interns, agency representatives and Pilsen residents, the steering committee has served as the planning and design group - the "nerve center" - through which information, proposals, arguments and problems are processed. As a consequence of the steering committee's work, a more expansive and growing social learning network has formed. The network extends from the committee into the university, several Pilsen parishes and an increasing number of Pilsen homes.

### **Context**

The term "social learning network" refers to people connected routinely through interactions that serve the common purpose of developing and disseminating knowledge about a particular shared interest. In this context, the shared interest is understanding the causes of stresses that families face and grasping solutions that empower families to solve their problems. This view of a learning network might sound somewhat different from the currently popular use of the term. That popular use defines a learning network as a computer learning network, often established as part

of an educational reform strategy. While Esperanza Familiar's social learning network functions partially through technological connections, it is social relationships that make it a network.

The family empowerment strategy itself, based as it is on education in the neighborhood, draws on the tradition of the Jane Addams Hull-House, which was originally located on properties only blocks from TRP. In this tradition, classes, workshops and social groups are formed for and with residents: the content evolves to reflect the culture, interests and needs of neighborhood residents (Addams, 1910).

Pilsen has long served as one of Chicago's primary ports-of-entry for new immigrant groups. Indeed, "Pilsen" was named by its Czech immigrants after a similarly named city in their homeland. The waves of 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 an Hispanic community, predominated by persons of Mexican heritage, many of them recent arrivals. According to the 1990 Census, 88 percent of Pilsen's 46,000 residents are Latino, most of them of Mexican heritage.

Located on Chicago's Lower West Side, Pilsen lies one mile south of the UIC campus. Its population is best characterized as working-poor. Pilsen is a vibrant, bustling, poor community with many strengths and many problems. As Janise Hurtig (1996, 141), 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 taquerias (taco restaurants), panaderias (Mexican bakeries), street vendors and colorful murals on near every street corner." But amidst these signs of vitality live families facing many pressing problems.

The 1990 Census found that 28.9 percent of residents of the Lower West Side (which includes the neighboring "Little Village," also a predominately Mexican-American community area) live 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, often starting to recruit children in the 3rd and 4th 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 requires first a description of the project's origins. In 1996, some of The Resurrection Project'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, expressed concerns 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 that would be able to draw effectively on 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 activities, these leaders wanted to make available to families services that would emphasize education and mutual help, rather than therapy. Indeed, they referred to the early

settlement house as an appealing model.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, just prior to its contact with TRP, the College had been planning to establish new community-based, faculty-student teams that 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, the College's interest in community-based education and research, and the predispositions of critical leaders, the time was ripe for a partnership.

The emergence of the partnership was triggered by TRP's request to UIC's Great Cities<sup>1</sup> program for assistance in developing a new initiative 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 a community assessment.

The students worked through the Summer of 1996. They met regularly with Weagant, Rev. Dahm, Neri and Megan Reilly, a community organizer on St. Pius's staff, to review their methods and findings. Reilly and other parish staff helped the students conduct focus sessions with different groups of Pilsen residents: mothers, teens, fathers and undocumented persons. Reilly was the critical link with the parishes in recruiting participants and meeting places. Reilly also observed several of the sessions and helped critique the summaries that students wrote.

By providing extensive information with which to work, the assessment data allowed the group to move to the planning stage. At this point, in Fall, 1996, the group began to refer to itself as a "steering committee." It also began to expand. Richard Kordesh, this paper's author, began to serve as the faculty liaison between TRP and the College. A team of three student interns began serving as staff to the steering committee and subcommittees that were being formed. The steering committee grew to include more clergy, parish staff, and agency representatives.

During the next nine months, the steering committee addressed many planning issues and 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.*

The Committee studied many family education and support models from around the United States, especially those focusing on Latino families.<sup>2</sup> 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 taking 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 be taking classes to join existing institutions such as block clubs, small faith communities and TRP's small business cooperative.

Satisfied with its initial program model, TRIP began seeking small foundation grants to<sup>2</sup> 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 TRIP. 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 child care 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. Adalbert parish in Pilsen, and having started other classes. Another new team of three students, supervised by Kordesh, was working with Esperanza Familiar and the steering committee.

### **Studying the Emergence of the Social Learning Network Around Esperanza Familiar**

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

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 without a formal organizing strategy on the part of participants (Knoke and Kuklinski 1982; Scott 1991). However, applied disciplines such as social work use the network analysis to identify guidelines for deliberate, network building practices (Hardcastle, Wenocur and Powers 1997). In the latter works, network building is viewed as a consciously applied community organizing method.

The network forming around Esperanza Familiar is essentially a social network formed around the common purpose of knowledge development and dissemination. The particular knowledge of interest is that which advances the objective of family empowerment. The network itself has evolved through stages corresponding with the typical stages of project development: assessment, planning and implementation. What began with a small network in the early meetings of the steering committee has evolved into a larger, more diverse, multi-site network no longer constituted solely by the steering committee. However, despite the complexity taken on by the network, the steering committee continues to serve as a hub through which ideas, proposals, disagreements and new information flow.

The following model of the network and its iterations is meant to simplify the complex relationships that have formed through this university-community partnership. The model will help highlight and scrutinize the processes of knowledge development and dissemination that make it a learning network. The analysis will utilize six criteria common in the network literature (Hardcastle, Wenocur and Powers 1997, pp.288-298): size, density, centrality, coordination, symmetry and domain consensus.

**Size** simply refers to the number of participants.

**Density** refers to the actual number of relationships compared to the possible number of

relationships. A large network can have low density, for example, if many participants do not interact with one another. High density is present when many participants are interacting frequently.

**Centrality** refers to a point through which participants have to go to interact with other participants. A highly centralized network is one in which all participants must go through one person or organizational unit - or in Esperanza Familiar's case, a steering committee to get a decision approved or to acquire some information from another.

**Coordination** addresses the level of conscious, mutual planning and adjustment that takes place in the network among participants.

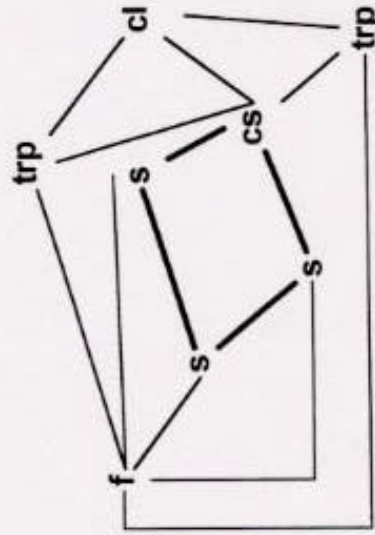
**Symmetry** focuses on the balance of resources and critical activities among various units of the network, especially as those resources and activities affect the network's central purpose. In this analysis, that central purpose is knowledge development and dissemination.

**Domain Consensus** is the agreement among participating units - persons, organizations or suborganizational divisions - about their varied responsibilities and functions.

**Stage 1 Network: Summer, 1996 to January, 1997, Assessment Phase**

Figure 1 depicts the social learning network as it began to form in September, 1996, when 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 --

Figure 1  
Stage 1 Network: Assessment Phase



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

R. S. Kordesh, 1998

three students, a TRP board member (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 regularly attended assessment meetings. 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 services currently available to them.

At this early, exploratory phase, participants shared no particular program model. Nor was there an agreed-upon name for the initiative. The varied labels the steering committee used for the initiative - "family mental health," "an alternative school for families," a "family support center without walls" - reflected how the planners had yet to arrive at a consensus about the basic goals and strategies the project would implement.

The shape of the network in Figure 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," a task rotated among different members. Meetings were lively and open. "Density" was already strong -- there was active and ongoing communication within this small network both at and between meetings. Fueling the interaction were two sets of working relationships: The student interns worked closely as a team in the same office at TRP, and 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 small size 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. At this stage, symmetry was not a pressing issue, given the network's size. Domain consensus was arrived at easily, given the straightforward nature of the assessment task.

From the outset, learning was clearly a shared goal. Whatever form the program would take, it was agreed it would be education-based. Rev. 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 faculty discussed how the 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 community theory seminars and policy courses to examine the project's practice and research implications. Kordesh and Hairston, the College's Dean, submitted a proposal during Fall, 1996, for funding to study the project's implications for curriculum reform in graduate social work education.

### **Stage 2 Network: February, 1997 to January, 1998, 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 these families form ongoing support groups, and provide counseling where needed. It also would cultivate leadership, with a few parents each year trained to teach classes themselves. The project also would encourage

families to join TRP's block clubs and the "base communities" already active in the parishes.

Figure 2 depicts how the original, small network in Stage 1 had grown. At this point, TRP had hired Juan Salgado in the position of 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 considerably hastened the process of fund development. Proposals for foundation funds were drafted, a process that led to 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. Staff and clergy from St. Adalbert and St. Procopius parishes joined their counterparts from St. Pius parish as active participants. In addition, Maria Iniguez, a Pilsen resident and social worker with Catholic Charities who had been chairing the new curriculum subcommittee, 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 College's student interns as the project's "engine (Lieber, 1997):" they spent the most time of any steering committee members 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 Rev. Dahm and Reilly to speak with public school principals about the possibility of 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 evolved into 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, providing counseling to a small number of youths. Although 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. As mentioned above, he also led a seminar for the steering committee on his prior research into "family empowerment associations."



In sum, Figure 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 eventuate in changes that would further centralize the network, and intensify (or add to the "density" of) the relationships among the steering committee, the College, the Great Cities program at UIC, and the parish and school sites.

Matters related to coordination, symmetry and domain consensus were being worked out at this stage through drafting funding proposals. Two types of funding proposals were 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 form 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 not to 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. It identified communication channels between the College and the steering committee. It discussed how the project would generate case material for use in specific College seminars. And, 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.

Although the joint proposal was not submitted in its entirety to one funder, during this critical planning stage, writing it and having it debated by the steering committee helped clarify how the fuller network would function. Domain consensus started to be established through identification of the research and university-based and community-based education that would take place. The proposal began to legitimate the exchanges of information among these domains, ensuring that the symmetry among them 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, multi-site, diversified network, grounded in the fundamental purpose of learning.

### **Stage 3 Network: February, 1998 to Present, 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 to 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 Spring semester, 1998, he made *Esperanza Familiar* a focus 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 potential impacts of UIC's south campus expansion.

Figure 3 depicts how diversified, and yet how centralized, the network is becoming. New classes have formed at the parish sites. Parents from the sites will begin attending steering committee meetings as well. The learning network has begun 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 apparently triggers conversation at home among other family members about how the family manages tension.

Mosquera, the students who help facilitate the sessions, and parent representatives relate these experiences (of course, protecting the confidentiality of individual families) to the steering committee for use in proposal development, evaluation, and recruiting of new sites. Graduate students draw 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*.

A new domain of the network will form soon. The Department of Family Medicine at UIC had been negotiating with TRP over several years to locate a site for a new health clinic in Pilsen. In tandem with those negotiations, Family Medicine acquired funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a project that would train its Pilsen practitioners in culturally competent medical practice.

This funding allowed the Department to contract for a portion of Kordesh's time as a "



community relations specialist" between the new clinic and Esperanza Familiar. Moreover, the grant will support the hiring by the new clinic of a community health liaison, a parent living in Pilsen and recruited through Esperanza Familiar to serve as a personal guide for the new clinic's residents into Pilsen. The clinic will open in Winter, 1999, in a building recently purchased by TRP, located one block away from TRP's and Esperanza Familiar's offices.

Clinic staff will become part of the social learning network due to the direct, educational objectives of the NIH grant. Esperanza Familiar will, in effect, serve as the channel through which clinicians will learn about the community, in particular about the homebased remedies and the curanderos, or spiritual healers, who are part of a Mexican community's informal health care system. Curanderos will also be invited by Mosquera to serve as resource persons at Esperanza Familiar's classes, helping to encourage clinic use by families, and in turn, learning more about their potential clientele.

The expanding size and complexity of the network are triggering changes that are germane to this analysis. As of this writing, the highest density within the network has now shifted from the steering committee to the parish sites. These are now where the interactions are most frequent and intense. This is due in part to the intensive activity generated by the classes and in part to Mosquera's decision to delay convening the steering committee until summer concluded.

Mosquera, the project's first full-time director, is assuming more leadership over the direction and content of the program and is seeking more influence over the agenda of the steering committee. As a result, the activity around the steering committee has diminished somewhat, whereas at the parish sites, it has intensified.

Clearly, and rightfully from a management standpoint, the network has also become more centralized around Mosquera. This is true at least with respect to classes and services for families. However, with respect to the full network of the university-community partnership, a second center appears to be emerging around Kordesh's position of faculty liaison to the project. The faculty liaison is the "bridging" position between the center at TRP and the College. While serving this bridging role, the faculty liaison has become a secondary center.

Despite the central roles played by the two positions, coordination still depends on the steering committee. In fact, given the complexity of the various networks and the multiplicity of emerging domains, the steering committee will likely need to serve permanently as the forum through which the various interests represented by these domains can be integrated. In addition to the steering committee, those domains now include clusters of participants at three parish sites, one child care site, one public school, several university seminars, and a new health clinic. Establishing symmetry among those domains will also be important if the central purposes of the project are to be achieved. Moreover, symmetry will be important in maintaining a proper learning atmosphere in which all participants recognize that they have both knowledge to share and to gain.

### **Long-Term Durability**

What does this beginning analysis suggest about the potential long-term durability of this university-community partnership? Seeing the social learning network through the perspective of each of the variables discussed earlier can help illuminate its prospects.

On its own, the size of the network might not yet be an issue, but the timing of its growth could eventually generate concern. For instance, the rapid addition of significant new domains at parish sites might be expanding the network faster than the steering committee's capacity for coordination. Moreover, the steering committee has not met during the summer, partially due to the vacation season, but also partially due to Mosquera's strategy of getting a better grasp of the project. Thus, when the steering committee convened for the first time in three months in September, a larger and more dispersed network was in place.

The steering committee's role in coordination within the full partnership network remains critical to maintaining symmetry among the domains. Steering committee meetings are unique in that they allow the "big picture" of the partnership to be kept in focus. That picture includes not only classes for families, but also the developments in the College as well - research projects on family support, the impact on the curriculum, and the use of the project in community theory and practice seminars. Considering the research interests of faculty, for instance, in juxtaposition to the evaluation needs of Esperanza Familiar's classes helps keep in focus the potential to generate knowledge for dissemination to other schools of social work. Symmetry within the increasingly multi-faceted network depends on a strong and active steering committee. The strength and vitality of the steering committee depend on its maintaining a central position in the network.

Maintaining high density levels will be important to ensuring the project's longevity. A certain threshold level of density -intensive interactions within the main College and community domains - is necessary to build a strong sense of ownership for the learning network. Moreover, density is necessary for learning to continue and to feed on itself. For instance, were the College's interest in the partnership to be diverted onto another new initiative, there could follow a decline in faculty interest in integrating material from it into seminars and research proposals. The density of the network's domains in the College would diminish. New students would not learn of the project and seek out internships with it. TRP staff might make presentations to College seminars less frequently, and their bonds with faculty and students would weaken.

The commitment of leadership within the College and in the university at large will be necessary to maintain the density of the partnership within the College. That commitment is strong. The College's Dean has been quite supportive of the project. Ongoing funding from Great Cities (which initially drew from COPC funds) has helped give the project a high profile. Other College faculty are seeking to involve TRP in family support training and research projects. The College is planning several new service initiatives with TRP, building directly on the partnership around Esperanza Familiar. One new initiative will be a documentary on Esperanza Familiar, illustrating how it is a modern reflection of the settlement house tradition. Faith Bonecutter, a faculty member and Director of the College's Bachelor of Social Work program, is taking the lead with the documentary.

### **Impacts on Learning and on Pilsen Families**

As stated above, this study defines a social learning network as persons and organizations interacting routinely around the process of learning. Whereas the defining task of the network is learning, the objective of Esperanza Familiar itself is to strengthen Pilsen's families through an education-based project using classes on parenting, family communications, understanding family history, and other topics. Formed as it is around this family empowerment project, the network will generate knowledge about communitybased, family empowerment practice and

disseminate that knowledge to students and schools of social work nationally. Analyzing the partnership's network can strengthen Esperanza Familiar's capacity to empower families.

Just as the builders of the early settlement houses learned, community-based programs aimed at strengthening families must involve those families in productive roles in all phases of assessment, planning and implementation. This involvement helps ensure cultural competency and relevancy in the curriculum. It helps reach out to families who most need Esperanza Familiar. It helps develop leaders and teachers of future classes. And, it aids in the transition of families from Esperanza Familiar's classes into other family-based institutions outside of this network and in Pilsen.

Thus, it is critical that families, parents and youth become active in the various domains of the network. It is particularly critical that parents become active members of the steering committee and the sub-networks forming at the parish, center and school sites. With the assistance of the College's graduate students, Mosquera is taking steps to ensure that parents take productive roles with Esperanza Familiar. The curriculum with which she is experimenting draws heavily on the educative, reflective approach advocated by Paulo Friere in his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). The curriculum also benefits from current family support approaches utilized by other successful agencies that serve Latino families.

As mentioned earlier, to illustrate the reflection encouraged by the seminars, parents are asked to do "homework." Between classes, they monitor their own reactions to family events, such as those that trigger conflict. For instance, they take notes on how they respond to their children's misbehavior and contemplate where they themselves might have learned such responses. Often the sources are their own childhood experiences. They might unconsciously be modeling oppressive tactics they themselves experienced in schools, in their villages, or in their own families. They are encouraged to consider what are the deeper, societal sources of violence in their own lives and in the lives of their children. Having exposed such sources, they are 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 learn from each other. They teach each other. Staff facilitators learn from them the causes of problems faced by Pilsen's families. They bring this learning into the steering committee's deliberations. It feeds the entire network.

The ultimate success of Esperanza Familiar depends on this learning enduring beyond the participation of families in this project's social learning network. There is good reason to believe that for many families it will do so. That is because Esperanza Familiar is nested in TRP and the churches that formed it. Esperanza Familiar aims to help families join block clubs, small faith communities, and other family-based institutions that are part of TRP's larger social network.

Just as Jane Addams recognized in her community-based work, such webs of connection must be bolstered through education. Research must investigate the conditions that would threaten the viability of these small communities. Everyone involved in such a community based enterprise has much to learn. A vital, engaging university-community partnership can make this education real.

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## Notes

1. My main sources for the description of Esperanza Familiar's creation are from my role as a participant observer in over 50 meetings 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 have 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, Bess Lumpkin, have also been tracking Esperanza Familiar's progress, and they too must be recognized as part 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.





