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Child Welfare Partnership for Research and Training: A Title IV-E University/Community Collaborative Research Model

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TITLE: Child Welfare Partnership for Research and Training: A Title IV-E
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ABSTRACT:
University-community partnerships are increasingly recognized as valuable in educating students for professional practice and bridging the gap between research and practice. This manuscript describes the evolution and design of a university-community partnership between a School of Social Work in one urban university and local child welfare agencies: the Child Welfare Partnership for Research and Training (CW-PART). This local partnership illustrates types of opportunities and outcomes that emerge when state and local entities leverage greater results from federal funding through partnerships with local universities.   The manuscript describes 1), the community-engaged framework used to inform the overall approach and partner roles; 2) evolution of the model from early partnered research successes; 3) core elements of the CW-PART university-community partnered research model, and 4) preliminary lessons learned from the pilot phase of model.

Child Welfare Partnership for Research and Training:
A Title IV-E University/Community Collaborative Research Model

Introduction

University-community partnerships are valuable in educating students for professional practice, advancing knowledge, and leveraging resources to address social problems (Barnes, et al., 2009; Begun, Berger, Otto-Salaj, & Rose, 2010; Buys & Bursnall, 2007; Gutheil & Heyman, 2010; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005; Wertheimer, Beck, Brooks, & Wolk, 2004). Title IV-E training programs strive to maximize the potential of university-community partnerships in preparing students for practice in public child welfare settings (Collins-Camargo & Hoffman, 2006; Risley-Curtiss, 2003; Zlotnik, 2003). Although there is a growing recognition of the importance of university-community partnerships with an explicit focus on research (Begun, et al., 2010), there is a dearth of information in the literature describing partnered research models designed to facilitate collaborative research in the context of child welfare, including federally funded child welfare educational programs and other related initiatives. This article describes the evolution and design of a partnered research initiative between one school of social work and local communities centered in, but extending beyond, child welfare.

Evidence Based Practice and Implementation Science

Enhanced collaboration through university-community partnerships is particularly beneficial in a climate of increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice (Barth, 2008) and of diminishing resources for social service programming (Wertheimer, et al., 2004). Child welfare agencies are increasingly challenged to evaluate the evidence-base of practices, programs and policies (Barth, 2008; Chaffin & Friedrich, 2004; Cunningham & Duffee, 2009; Landsverk, Brown, Rolls Reutz, Palinkas, & Horwitz, 2011; Landsverk, Garland, Reutz, & Davis, 2011; Littell & Shlonsky, 2010; Luongo, 2007; Osterling & Austin, 2008). Evidence based practice

(EBP), broadly defined, involves the process of both selecting and implementing interventions with empirical support (Barth, 2008; Chaffin & Friedrich, 2004). Barth (2008) identifies three stages in moving practice toward a more evidence based approach in child welfare: discovery of new knowledge; development of effective methods based on new knowledge; and delivery of knowledge and new interventions in a manner that may be understood and applied. Gibbs (2003) and Sackett et al. (1996) describe EBP as a process through which practitioners integrate the best available evidence with clinical and contextual knowledge. In this conceptualization evidence-based practice is considered a process of critical thinking in practitioners integrate multiple sources of knowledge (Gambrill, 2011). The specific steps of this process include identifying practice based questions, seeking and evaluating applicable evidence, and integrating critical appraisal of evidence with clinical expertise as well as recognition of client characteristics, circumstances, and preferences (Gambrill, 2011).

Identifying effective interventions requires a concurrent focus on the process of implementation and evaluation (Aarons, Hurlburt, & Horwitz, 2011; Mildon & Shlonsky, 2011). Implementation science is an emerging area of research in child welfare (Landsverk, Brown, et al., 2011), which focuses on how research findings and evidence-based practices are integrated into practice in a specific setting (Graham, et al., 2006; Proctor, et al., 2009). Reliance on passive uptake strategies in child welfare is insufficient; rather implementation requires strategic planning, active involvement of stakeholders, and efforts to address contextual challenges to implementation (Mildon & Shlonsky, 2011). Implementation processes occur in non-linear stages (Aarons, et al., 2011; Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009), that may be summarized in four essential activities: 1) planning/exploration – the process of identifying a challenge or better intervention; 2) engaging/preparation – deciding on an innovation; 3) implementation –

executing the innovation, and 4) sustaining and evaluating the innovation (Aarons, Hurlburt, & Horowitz, 2010; Mildon & Shlonsky, 2011). Potential barriers across these essential activities include both attitudes of service providers and organizational factors, such as organizational culture, leadership, and resource availability (Mitchell, 2011). Recommendations for advancing evidence-based practices in child welfare contexts include encouraging adoption of a "learning organization" orientation among agencies, increasing emphasis on EBP in graduate training, and countering misperceptions about EBP among stakeholders (Chaffin & Friedrich, 2004).

Research Partnerships: Social Work Education and Child Welfare

Community-university partnerships have an important role in bridging the gap between research and practice in human services and child welfare systems (Collins-Camargo & Hoffman, 2006; Risley-Curtiss, 2003). Research questions are often posed and pursued in a manner that is disconnected from practice settings and isolated from service providers (Flynn & Brown, 2011). By contrast, community-university partnerships provide a vehicle for meaningful inclusion of all stakeholders in the research process. Collaboration facilitates access to resources, insights, skills, and experiences that may not exist within one agency or institution. For example, the university may share intellectual or technical resources while the community may share insight on concerns of highest priority (Cherry & Shefner, 2004; Shannon & Wang, 2010). Core elements of effective community-university partnerships include respect and exchange of unique contributions of partners; adoption of a long term perspective that accounts for the developmental nature of partnered research; consideration of the perspectives, priorities and concerns of partners; flexibility to address local needs and conditions; assessment of outcomes relevant to the local context; and clarity related to contribution of resources between partners (Begun, et al., 2010; Jensen, et al., 1999).

Collins-Carmago and Hoffman (2006) discuss the effectiveness of partnerships between university social work programs and public child welfare agencies at state and local levels, suggesting that partnerships build from but extend beyond IV-E training. They note that a key element of effective partnerships between social work programs and public child welfare organizations involves the transformation of child welfare agencies into learning organizations. They suggest "…Through collaborative identification of research topics with the potential to positively inform the field, and participatory research approaches that involve practitioners, studies taking place in the field will not only build the evidence base regarding child welfare practice, but promote a culture in which evaluation and research is an integral part of the learning organization" (p. 31). Collaborative partnerships also provide an opportunity for students to develop competencies related to using research to inform practice, engaging in evaluation, and disseminating research knowledge (Clark, 2003; Collins-Camargo & Hoffman, 2006).

Case examples of established research centers document the promise of conducting research on child welfare practice through large-scale, multidisciplinary research centers (Landsverk, Garland, et al., 2011) and multi-site research initiatives (Collins-Camargo, Shackelford, Kelly, & Martin-Galijatovic, 2011). At the same time, there are concurrent efforts to develop research agendas on state levels to help guide a broader array of local university-community partnerships focused on child welfare (California Social Work Education Center, 2008; Johnson, Wells, Testa, & McDonald, 2003). In spite of the growing emphasis on evidence-based practice and emerging opportunities for university-community research, there is a dearth of literature describing models for successful partnerships focused on evaluating and improving local child welfare services and systems, while concurrently developing student competencies in research (Collins-Camargo, Flaherty, & Weeks, 2007; Collins-Camargo & Hoffman, 2006;

Risley-Curtiss, 2003)

      This article describes a university-community partnership between a school of social work in one urban university and local county child welfare agencies: the Child Welfare Partnership for Research and Training (CW-PART). The partnership evolved over time, through a series of partnered research projects led by several faculty members with support from different federal, state, and local resources. This local partnership illustrates types of opportunities and outcomes that emerge when state and local entities leverage greater results from federal funding (e.g., from the Children's Bureau) through collaboration with local universities.   Specifically, this article describes: 1) the community-engaged framework used to inform the overall approach and partner roles; 2) core elements of the CW-PART university-community partnered research model, and 3) preliminary lessons learned from the pilot phase of the model.

Community-Engaged Framework

      The Child Welfare Partnership for Research and Training is based on a community-engaged framework for applied research. Community engagement is defined broadly as working collaboratively with diverse groups of people who are affiliated by social ties, common interests or perspectives, and geographic location (Clinical and Translational Science Awards [CTSA], 2011; MacQueen, et al., 2001; McDonald, 2009). Within this context, the community in the current partnership is defined as the child welfare agency (including Field Instructors and other agency members) and associated stakeholders, such as members of other social service systems (e.g. substance abuse, mental health) or community-based agencies who deliver services to families and children involved in the child welfare system. The community-engaged approach to research is broadly defined as a continuum of strategies aimed at community engagement in the research process (McDonald, 2009; OCTRI, nd). University partners include faculty, students,

and affiliates of the school of social work who operate in the nexus between systems, such as the

Title IV-E Program Coordinator and an internship coordinator located in child welfare who also

serves as a faculty field liaison to the school of social work.

Community-engaged research includes a spectrum of possible levels of community

engagement, which may range from simply relying on communities for consultation or advice, to

more meaningful levels of involvement characterized by greater communication, trust, and

shared responsibility (CTSA, 2011). Levels of involvement may vary from project to project, as

well as within projects (McDonald, 2009). McDonald (2009) contrasts community-engaged

research with traditional research. Processes within *traditional research* are entirely controlled

by the researchers (McDonald). On the other end of the spectrum is *community-based*

participatory research in which community members are full and equal partners within all

aspects of the research process. Community-based participatory research models are valuable in

facilitating community change; at the same time other strategies for community-engaged

research are also promising in social work contexts (Begun, et al., 2010). In the center of the

spectrum is *research with the community*, in which researchers may control many aspects of the

research process, while also inviting meaningful participation of community members in

advisory or participant roles (McDonald; OCTRI, nd). The CW-PART is a community-engaged

approach that is best characterized as research with the community. Specifically, the CW-PART

is a partnered research model, which embodies a respectful partnership with community

members and allows researchers and community members to mutually define their respective

roles and negotiate responsibilities (as described in greater detail below). In this context,

researchers provide leadership for projects that are defined, implemented, and disseminated with

full involvement with agency partners and participation of both students and practitioners.

Core Elements of the Model

History, Rationale, and Structure of the Model

The CW-PART project evolved within a school of social work that has a strong history of conducting research projects in collaboration with local counties, with involvement of students. Our effort to formalize and extend our model of community engaged research was developed in one Northern California county with a pilot project designed to build capacity for practice-based research among Masters of Social Work students, with a specific focus on child welfare. The existing program of research training for MSW students consisted of a two-semester introductory course on research design, methods and analysis, followed the next year by a two-semester course in which students designed and conducted an individual research project. While serving the learning needs of students, the approach could be burdensome; in addition to each MSW student designing, conducting, and reporting upon an independent research project, each supervising faculty member oversaw 13-18 individual research projects usually outside his or her field of interest, the university had to review separate student human subjects research proposals each year, and the county child welfare agency had to provide data for, and supervise, numerous individual research projects. Furthermore, the individual projects were often limited in scope, and therefore limited in terms of utility for informing policy or practice.

The CW-PART leveraged existing resources by building on the infrastructure of both the final year culminating 2-semester research course (outlined above) and the IV-E program. The IV-E program provides training and education for students who are interested in working as social work professionals in a public child welfare agency. The California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) provides support and oversight for IV-E child welfare training and education programs in the state of California associated with 21 participating graduate schools of

social work. Although all programs are required to ensure that students achieve specific

competencies upon graduation, each program has autonomy in the design and delivery of

curriculum. The CW-PART augmented core elements of the School's Title IV-E Training

Program (specific strategies described below). Core elements of the IV-E program include a

substantial number of field placements in the local county (13 to 16), special seminars for IV-E

students lead by the Title IV-E Program Coordinator, oversight of local field placements through

a designated county manager, and guidance through an advisory board comprised of both

academic and county stakeholders.

       Several faculty members had successfully led child welfare-based studies using student

research teams and in collaboration with local child welfare agencies through funded research

projects prior to implementation of the pilot project. Based on this collaborative foundation, we

began working with a local child welfare agency to formalize these processes and increase

community engagement with our pilot model. This pilot project sought to improve research

training for students and better address the research needs of the agency while simplifying the

process for all participants. The model we developed involved: 1) a collaborative process

between agency managers and social work faculty to identify priority research questions of the

agency; 2) the creation of research teams composed of students, faculty, and field instructors to

pursue those questions within the context of the second year research course; and 3) a

dissemination strategy utilizing a variety of mechanisms. The pilot project will be expanded and

enhanced with the receipt of a larger multi-year grant allowing us to extend the model into a

second county, increase the number of faculty leading research teams, and develop a sustainable

and ongoing partnership with both counties.

       The elements of the CW-PART model may be described using the four essential activities

of implementation science (as described by Mildon & Shlonsky, 2011). In this way, the processes of coordinating the overall project are parallel to the implementation of research and evaluation projects in partnership with the county. The remainder of this section describes the CW-PART in relation to each of these four essential activities: 1) exploration/planning 2) engaging/preparation 3) implementation and 4) ongoing sustainability and evaluation.

Exploration/Planning

The process of research question development was an iterative one. At an initial meeting, county personnel proposed a number of research ideas and reviewed general topic areas of current interest to the county. Our study leadership team brought those ideas back to our school and matched them to involved faculty members with relevant research interests. The extensive list of potential research questions was narrowed by considering county priorities, providing faculty who teach research classes with an opportunity to volunteer to lead a project that aligned with their research interest or methodological expertise. These faculty members worked to craft the ideas into specific, answerable questions for research teams to pursue. To facilitate communication, and to reduce potential burden on the partner agency, one key point person from the university and the county agency helped to broker questions and identify prospective research team partners. These questions were then submitted again to the county for approval before finalization.

Engagement/Preparation

Once research topics and preliminary questions were identified and prioritized, brief summaries of the prospective projects were circulated to graduate students along with faculty contact information. Students were invited to contact faculty affiliated with topics and questions of interest to them. Through the interview process, students were matched with projects that

corresponded with their interests and preferences. Priority was given to students affiliated with

the IV-E program, but other interested students were interviewed and assigned to research teams.

Within the CW-PART project, members of the child welfare community and associated

stakeholders were invited to participate in the research process at various levels of engagement

that generally corresponded to their personal interest level, expertise and availability to

contribute to the project. Particular child welfare agency managers and analysts participated at

the greatest level and identified research topic areas, provided feedback on research questions,

and made suggestions for engaging field instructors in the process. For instance, the child

welfare Field Instructor Coordinator was a member of the CW-PART Leadership Team and was

directly involved in all aspects of project management. Field instructors of students on the

research teams were invited to participate in an orientation to the project, which provided an

important collaborative opportunity to describe the study topics and the research team model,

and to gather feedback on how the project could best be implemented in the county. As research

teams began conducting their studies, field instructors were kept informed about all study

processes through regular email updates, including information about who would be included in

the study samples, the types of data being collected, and ongoing interpretations of the data. In

addition, field instructors were invited to participate in research team meetings in order to

discuss how the research project could be used to facilitate student learning of applied research

skills.

Implementation

Collaborative research teams are at the heart of the pilot project model. As noted above,

our previous model of research instruction was one in which individual students pursued

independent research questions, often with minimal input from their assigned field instructors

who may not have been accustomed to using research or data in their own practice. With the new team approach, students worked as members of a faculty led research team; as such they were involved in each stage of the applied research process: engaging with the research team and stakeholders to identify and articulate the research question, developing the research plan, collecting and analyzing data, interpreting implications for practice, and disseminating findings. As the research teams operated through the vehicle of the MSW final year research course, the faculty member leading the teams was usually the course instructor for students on the research team.

The dissemination strategy built upon the School's current practice -- in which students write up individual studies into APA format, article-length reports -- but added several new dissemination avenues. First, each research team provided a brief, executive-summary-style report to county administrators, designed to convey research findings and implications to busy, non-academic policy and practice professionals. Second, email listserves were created for each research team in which faculty team leaders provided monthly updates on progress. Students, faculty leaders, and field instructors were on the email list, but any other county personnel interested in the issue could request to join the list. In addition to serving as a dissemination device, the list also enabled county personnel to provide practice-based feedback and guidance to the conduct of the study as it unfolded and to assist with the interpretation of findings. Third, an interactive discussion forum for dissemination of findings from one collaborative research study was piloted. The study, which was conducted in the county over the previous year, was focused on the experiences and outcomes of immigrant children in the child welfare system. All interested staff and stakeholders were invited to attend the discussion forum; findings were shared in an interactive format and the implications of the findings were discussed. Specific

topics included identification of the most important findings from the research; how the findings corresponded or conflicted with practice experience; how the findings could be used to support or promote particular practices and policies; identification of other groups who may benefit from learning about the research; and areas for future research. Finally, a showcase at the end of the year involved presentations by research team members to interested county, university and community stakeholders, in an interactive forum. This showcase was structured in a similar way as the discussion forum on the immigrant study findings; however, it included findings from all of the research teams and provided students with the opportunity to explain and discuss their study.

Table 1 provides a brief case illustration of the model as demonstrated by one of the recent research teams. This team explored the role of fathers in the process of child welfare reunification. All students on the team were either interns or part-time employees of the county; however this was not required and other research teams included students who were placed in other field settings but had an interest in the research topic. Data for the study came from a prior study by the faculty team leader. In the case of this team, the faculty leader for the team was not teaching the advanced year research course, but worked closely with instructors supervising students' progress in the course. An email group was used to share monthly updates and get feedback from agency representatives on the team (the three field instructors). The research team met several times per month in the fall semester, to discuss available elements in the data set and clarify the research interests of each student. The team selected three questions to pursue and applied appropriate data analysis techniques to answer those questions, with faculty guidance. The research team presented their findings to the county at a roundtable presentation with the other research teams.

Sustainability and Evaluation

Sustainability for the project was facilitated by integrating use of the second year research course as a vehicle for the research team model for child welfare projects. Supplemental training on skills considered valuable for both research and practice, such as the use of child welfare information systems to conduct research or provide background information in research reports, were integrated into the Title IV-E seminar. The existing course structure, in which one faculty member supervises the research projects of approximately 15 students, lent itself neatly to the research team model, in which the faculty member lead several research teams of 3-6 students. The number of diverse faculty members participating as research team leaders ensured that research teams for county questions were led by faculty members with relevant research interests and experience, enabling superior supervision but also benefits to faculty who were able to increase their investment and interest in the project. A process evaluation of the CW-PART model was also developed and implemented through a student team, linked to the MSW research course.

Funding of a planning phase for development of the partnered research model allowed for the creation of an infrastructure enabling the School to better support and sustain a university/county partnership. Aspects of this infrastructure included a planned and facilitated process of collaboration with child welfare agencies to identify and articulate priority research questions, strategies for ongoing, regular communication with agency partners, and the development and implementation of multi-year research projects that avoid annual start-up issues and can potentially serve as pilot studies for larger grant applications.

Discussion: Lessons Learned and Next Steps

This article summarizes a pilot project designed to develop a sustainable partnership between

child welfare agencies and a local school of social work with the purpose of creating a flexible

structure for mobilizing teams of faculty, Title IV-E and other interested MSW students, and agency

partners in a collaborative effort to answer questions critical to improvement of child welfare

services and systems. The partnership structure also helps to meet overarching goals of educating

and training persons who provide case management services for IV-E eligible foster children in the

state of California. First, the development of sustainable research partnerships creates a structure for

training Title IV-E students in skills and concepts directly relevant to their work in the field –

namely, research, evaluation and use of data in decision-making in a child welfare context. Students

benefit from full engagement in practice-based research on "real" questions, in partnership with

professionals who will be their peers after graduation. They enter the work force with highly valued

competencies in using data to inform practice, capacity to identify and address research or evaluation

questions of interest, and enhanced ability to work collaboratively.

Process evaluation data, including interviews with students, field instructors and key

project staff, as well as satisfaction surveys are being used to identify challenges and strengths in

implementation. Evaluation data will be used to document important aspects of implementation

so that the model might be replicated in other counties. The process evaluation is designed to

document changes in how field instructors advise students on their research projects, and their

overall involvement with the research teams; it will also document student perceptions of the

research teams and the quality of the applied research training they received. An outcome

evaluation is underway as well to assess the impact of the new model on outcomes related to

curriculum development, partnership development, students' preparation for practice-based

research, and their ability to use research to inform program development.

Several "key ingredients" for successful partnered research have been documented thus

far through the ongoing process evaluation. These ingredients are congruent with frameworks

described in the literature related to both implementation science and University/Community

research partnerships. First, the project is grounded in, and fueled by, *respectful partnership*,

which is a theme that is echoed in research literature (Begun, et al., 2010; Jensen, et al., 1999).

This respectful partnership involves flexibility in managing the timeline and tasks of the research

teams; recognition of the demands and constraints in both university and agency settings;

willingness to problem-solve as challenges arise; and active attention to building and sustaining

relationships in addition to completing project related tasks. *Support of leadership* in both the

agency and university contexts is critical to both leveraging resources (i.e., time for agency staff

to attend planning meetings and allowing integration of research into existing MSW courses) and

endorsing the overall vision of creating a successful partnership. *Liaisons* in each system are

essential for managing the overall partnership, brokering resources, and serving as active

conduits between systems. Liaisons in the partnership include an intern coordinator with the

county, the IV-E Program Coordinator, and three to four faculty members. The key ingredients

related to leadership and liaisons are consistent with research related to implementation science,

which emphasize the importance of stakeholder involvement and the role of champions for

advancing change (Aarons, et al., 2011; Begun, et al., 2010; Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace,

2009; Mildon & Shlonsky, 2011) Finally, successful mobilization of this model required

organizational assets. Assets identified as fundamental to this partnered research project model

include a sufficient number of faculty who possessed backgrounds in conducting research in

child welfare and/or use of relevant methodologies; relevant courses in the social work

curriculum for accommodating a year-long research project; adequate numbers of

interns/students for creating research teams; and funding to pilot the model (in this case, through

the California Social Work Education Center). A conceptual model for implementation of

evidence-based practice in public service settings affirms the important of identifying both

external and internal resources (Aarons et all, 2011).

Plans for full implementation and institutionalization of the CW-PART are underway with

funding from the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC). The California Social

Work Education Center (CalSWEC) is a partnership between the schools of social work, public

human service agencies, and other related professional organizations in California (see

http://calswec.berkeley.edu/ in child welfare). The additional resources from the larger grant will

enable us to expand the pilot project in a number of ways, including: 1) extending the pilot

project to a second county, 2) increasing the number of faculty members leading research teams,

3) providing funds to pay for faculty release time to ensure intensive, high-quality supervision of

students on research teams and strong collaboration with county partners, 4) pursuing research

questions of greater significance that require larger investments of time and personnel, and 5)

exploring opportunities to expand the model to other counties in California.

Anticipated workforce improvement brought about by the implementation of the partnered

research structure include both *improved training for students* and *enhanced research capacity for*

agencies (Begun et al, 2010; Collins-Carmago & Hoffman, 2006). Students receive real-world

research training in a collaborative forum that better reflects the realities of practice. Additionally, as

faculty members are operating as research team leaders on a study aligned with their own research

interests, their mentoring and supervision of students are both hands-on and intensive. A second

benefit of the partnership structure for the workforce is enhanced research capacity for agencies.

While human service agencies have data and critical information needs, they often lack staff time

and institutional resources to pursue research. Creating and organizational culture and climate that

encourages the use of research and innovation increases the likelihood that individuals and groups

will use research evidence in practice (Aarons et al. 2011). The research team structure creates

opportunities for agencies to identify and obtain credible answers to high priority research questions

through the small research teams led by skilled faculty researchers that supervise the research project

and the dissemination of the findings..

The knowledge dissemination component of CW-PART is intended to address many of

the barriers that practitioners face when attempting to learn about and apply evidence-based

practices. Research points to a number of barriers that prevent practitioners from implementing

evidence-based practices, including: a general lack of awareness and a lack of access to relevant

research; the absence of opportunities to discuss research with colleagues; and studies that are

not understandable to practitioners due to complicated statistical analyses (Osterling and Austin,

2008). Moreover, the implications of research for practice are often too general or distanced from

practice contexts to be of value for practitioners or (Dal Santo, Goldberg, Choice, & Austin,

2002; Mitchell, 2011; Osterling and Austin, 2008). Written summaries, targeted discussion

forums and action plans that are concise, specific and understandable can promote the use of

research in practice (Dal Santo et al., 2002; Osterling and Austin, 2008).

Lessons learned from the pilot were incorporated into the design of the expanded CW-

PART model with the second grant from CalSWEC. For example, in our first meeting with the

county to identify research questions, we realized that a more structured and facilitated process

would be helpful in identifying and articulating questions, which we then built into the expanded

model. For instance, potential future research questions for the next academic year were

presented at the final showcase event in which the research teams will shared findings and

discussed implications. Part of this discussion included identification of potential future research

questions that emerged from the project. This initial discussion occurred at the end of the academic year so that potential research questions could be circulated to the Advisory Group for discussion before approval following year's research questions.

In another example, county managers suggested email lists be created as a strategy for dissemination and involvement of county personnel in the work of the research team and interpretation of findings. Monthly updates on research team progress were provided by faculty team leaders to members of the research team and associated stakeholders who were interested in the topic and wish to be included. The email updates described the current status and next steps in the research projects, as well as information on opportunities for field instructors and other personnel to participate in the project at various levels of engagement based on their interest and availability to participate. These opportunities included: participating in research team meetings, providing feedback on study instruments, connecting the team to other key experts or previous literature on the topic area, providing practice-based feedback and guidance to the study as it unfolds, and assisting with the interpretation of early findings.

In addition, the formation of the research teams included a process in which all IV-E students in the school of social work self-selected into a team that focused on a topic of interest for them. In the pilot project this process resulted in some research teams that include IV-E students from counties other than our target county; some research teams also included non-IV-E students. Rather than limit all activities and opportunities for research teams to our one target county, it was decided that all members and associated stakeholders of a research team would be included in research team and project updates. In this way, field instructors and students from neighboring counties would benefit from the information generated from the studies, and opportunities for the expansion of the partnered research model to other counties could be

explored.

Although the focus of the pilot was on developing a productive, sustainable partnership between the school of social work and the local child welfare agency with extensive participation by IV-E students, we hope to develop parallel partnered projects with other county and community partners. Future activities will include development of similar partnerships to investigate research questions related to other allied service delivery systems, such as alcohol and drug treatment services, mental health services, and Adult Protective Services.. Future partnerships will replicate the core processes piloted and refined through the CW-PART: 1) collaborating with child welfare agencies to identify and articulate priority research questions, 2) creating research teams of students, faculty and field instructors to investigate those questions, and 3) disseminating findings in a meaningful way for the agency using a variety of forums.

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Table 1: Case Illustration of Community-Engaged Research Framework: Research Team

investigating the Role of Fathers in Reunification

Project Elements	Description	Example
Research Question	Research questions were developed in an iterative process between the university and agency. Agency representatives provided a start list of possible research areas and shared information about current and pending initiative.	Specific research questions for this project included the following: 1. What is the effect of parental cohabitation on the likelihood of reunification, and does that vary with the presence of domestic violence in the home?; 2. What is the effect of father's use of services on the likelihood of mother's reunification, and does that vary by parental cohabitation? and 3. How do Latino reunifying fathers' differ from Caucasian fathers in terms of cohabitation, reunification, and service utilization rates? Does the effect of father's service use on reunification vary by race/ethnicity?
Team Formation and Facilitation	Students self-selected onto research teams by contacting faculty team leader. Field instructors were invited to participate based on level of interest (from providing feedback to servings as full members of research teams). Teams meet regularly throughout the project.	All students were working in county as interns or part-time employees; Faculty team leader for this team was not advanced year research course instructor, but worked closely with instructors of students. Email updates kept all team members informed and allow feedback and suggestions from field to inform study. Student research team members met bi-monthly with faculty team leader and individually with faculty team leader as needed.
Study Design	Study design was developed by faculty, with consultation of key agency partners and other faculty.	Secondary data analysis; original study was a retrospective cohort study examining characteristics, service use and outcomes for a sample of reunifying parents in one county.
Analysis & Interpretation	Analyses were conducted by the student research team members with faculty guidance, and interpretation involved perspectives from both researchers and practitioners.	Logistic regression with interaction terms was used to examine study questions. Preliminary findings were discussed with FI team members, and also at a preliminary meeting with interested county stakeholders.
Dissemination	A brief summary report of 1-2 pages was developed by the team, in addition to article length reports prepared by each team member in regards to their primary research question.	Findings were presented and implications discussed at a final showcase with other research teams, in addition to article length reports prepared by each team member in regards to their primary research question.