

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: THOUGHTS FROM U.S. COLLEAGUES

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Abstract

This paper represents an initial attempt to apply models of strategic alliances to cross-national transactions in social work education. In this paper, we will apply ideas developed by Bailey and Koney (2000) to ways in which U.S. schools of social work can partner internationally with schools seeking to initiate or further develop their own social work programmes. Drawing on our own international experience and that of others, we will illustrate partnership models, principles, and strategies that can guide social work education's cross-national collaborations elsewhere. Our aim is to promote international partnering by suggesting a conceptual model and some practical guidelines. In this regard, this paper represents a continuation of our prior efforts to further the knowledge necessary for global participation. Although it is primarily a descriptive paper, we attempt to illustrate how the use of conceptual models might help us to understand more fully the process of cross-national work, anticipate problems and opportunities, and plan for more effective and responsive partnerships. Future efforts must examine these and other models for strategic alliances to clarify their usefulness and to develop their applicability.

Introduction

For decades social work educators have worked together in cross-national partnerships to strengthen social work education and to promote *curriculum* development. International conferences sponsored by organisations such as the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Consortium for Social Development, demonstrate social work's concern with global involvement. The newest Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) of the United States' Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) includes several references to the global context of social work practice: "Guided by a person and environment construct, a *global perspective*, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, social work's purpose is actualised through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons" (CSWE 2008: 1). "Programmes are further influenced by their political, economic, social, cultural, demographic, and *global contexts* and by the ways they elect to engage these factors" (CSWE 2008: 2). "Social workers recognise the global interconnections of oppression and are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights" (CSWE 2008: 5). These statements are among the latest examples of U.S. social work's heightened global awareness and activities.

In addition to international conferences and CSWE's educational standards, the professional literature clearly reflects social work's strong commitment to global efforts (e.g., Chatterjee 1990; Chazin *et al.* 2002; Forgey *et al.* 2000; Forgey *et al.* 2003; Hanson *et al.* 2005; Horwath and Shardlow 2001; Midgley 1981; Nimmagadda and Cowger 2000; Taylor 1999). Beyond this commitment, authors have noted several problems confronting social work in its global efforts, particularly the danger of imposing irrelevant ideas from one country onto the efforts of another country (Bogo and Maeda 1990; Chatterjee 1990; Horwath and Shardlow 2001; Midgley 1981; Traub-Werner, *et al.* 2000). Preparation of social workers for active involvement with global problems requires an understanding of, and ability to address, the challenges and opportunities entailed in global collaboration. One such challenge is conceptualising the ways in which U.S. schools of social work can partner with the schools and organisations of other nations.

While there has been discussion of the various types of collaboration that have taken place (Asamoah 2003), little has been written to place these partnerships within conceptual frameworks and to develop guiding principles for the creation of strategic alliances to promote curriculum development. Asamoah (2003) suggests three important elements of successful collaboration, i.e. sustainability, mutuality, where partners benefit equally although not necessarily in the same ways, and ripple effect, i.e. gains are spread wider than a few participating institutions and individuals. Healy provides a broader conception, describing two forms of alliance, collaboration and coordination, with the former viewed as a higher level of relationship than the latter. She further denotes several factors necessary for a successful alliance (Healy 2003).

A review of the literature describing international partnerships involving schools of social work shows that relationships among partners have become considerably more complex over the years. Early partnerships often involved one-way contributions, with Westerners assisting those beginning social work educational programmes in countries where professional social work was less developed. Today, alliances are more likely to entail more complicated arrangements, involving mutuality, including study abroad programmes and other exchanges of faculty and students, as well as field placements across borders. As the globalisation of social work and social work education proceeds, it is likely that new, more complex forms of partnering will emerge. A broader conceptual frame in which to place different alliance forms should help in both planning and implementing these increasingly diverse organisational partnerships.

In this paper, we will apply ideas developed by Bailey and Koney (2000) to ways in which U.S. schools of social work can partner internationally with schools seeking to initiate or further develop their own social work programmes. Drawing on our own international experience and that of others, we will illustrate partnership models, principles, and strategies that can guide social work education's cross-national collaborations elsewhere. Our aim is to promote international partnering by suggesting a conceptual model and some practical guidelines. In this regard, this paper represents a continuation of our prior efforts to further the knowledge necessary for global participation (Chazin *et al.* 2002; Chazin *et al.* 2004; Hanson *et al.* 2005).

Among the topics we will discuss are: (1) describing possible partnership alliances, (2) clarifying the justifications for a partnership (e.g., social responsibility, mutual benefit), (3) identifying the phases of partnership development, (4) using evaluation, in particular "Participatory Action Research" to enhance and extend the partnership, and (5) case examples of the model.

The Bailey and Koney Model

Building on a model presented by Peterson (1991), Bailey and Koney (2000) suggest that the processes inherent in creating and sustaining strategic alliances form a continuum of interactions, from cooperation to coordination to collaboration to coadunation. These terms describe the extent to which organisations work together to achieve their goals. Moving along a continuum from the least to the highest degree of organisational integration, these models are defined next.

Cooperation: "In cooperation, fully autonomous entities share information to support each other's organisational activities" (Bailey and Koney 2000: 6). Cooperation is the least structured of the four alliance models presented. It is characterised by low levels of organisational interdependence and little formalisation of arrangements. Member organisations simply wish to share information or resources (e.g., special expertise). In this model, organisations choose to remain interdependent and avoid any formal, binding agreements.

Organisational self-interest is primary, with each member using the alliance resources to achieve its own interests. Administrative leadership is informal and usually there is no need for an official governing body. Regarding communication, responsibility for coordinating meetings and disseminating information is arranged informally, and meetings may be infrequent, and the duration of the project either short or long-term.

Coordination: In coordination, autonomous groups align activities, sponsor particular events and deliver targeted service in pursuit of compatible goals. While each organisation typically provides a written letter of agreement describing its commitments to the alliance, there is minimal integration of staffs or activities and the focus is on accomplishing specific tasks. Each organisation seeks to better achieve its organisational goals by aligning itself with another organisation with similar interests.

Collaboration: In collaboration, parties go beyond merely coordinating their efforts by jointly creating a strategy for working together toward a shared purpose. In addition to collective work of partners through common strategies, collaboration includes several features. The alliance purpose and strategies are broad in scope rather than limited to one issue. There is a formal plan for working together on a continuous basis, with written, formal agreements. These agreements include guidelines for jointly proceeding in their endeavour. Each party relinquishes some degree of autonomy toward the realisation of a jointly determined purpose, which requires a balancing of one's own organisational self-interest and the interests of the partner organisation. Collaboration may also lead to the creation of a separate entity formed to assist in the alliance's work. For example, collaboration may lead to the creation of a governance body with representatives of the member organisations. Collaboration also is characterised by ongoing, long-term duration, frequent contact of alliance members, and broad environmental linkages.

Coadunation: "In coadunation, member organisations unite within an integrated structure to the extent that one or all relinquish their autonomy in favour of a surviving organisation" (Bailey and Koney 2000: 6). This most radical of organisational alliances is best illustrated by mergers and consolidations. The authors are unaware of existing international alliances taking this form. The complete integration of two or more organisations seems beyond the meaning of alliance.

Movement through this continuum of cooperation, coordination, collaboration and coadunation involves change on two particularly salient features: decreasing organisational independence and increasing interdependence, and increasing formalisation of the relationship through the creation of policies and procedures. The alliance becomes more integrated and more formal. Organisational willingness to sacrifice independence and to conform to mutually agreed upon policies are two critical factors in selecting an alliance model.

Alliance Justifications

Six possible motivating benefits behind alliances are proposed by Bailey and Koney. They are resource interdependence, social responsibility, strategic enhancement, operational efficiency, environmental validity and domain influence.

1. **Resource interdependence:** An alliance is seen as offering each partner access to and opportunity to acquire and/or maintain resources that would improve each organisation's ability to achieve its service objectives. The alliance is a means of increasing such resources, e.g., funds, technological systems, personnel, access to valued information, desired service expertise, increased influence on public policy related to social welfare and greater creativity and innovation.

2. **Social responsibility:** An alliance may increase an organisation's ability to meet new community service needs, or better meet existing needs through more effective and efficient service delivery. One form of social responsibility is an organisation's desire to demonstrate to its community that it wishes to respond to the community's expectations for action in a specific area. Thus, a university may seek to develop a social work programme or have its existing programme develop specific expertise in order to meet a community need. For example, one school confronting a rise in community AIDS may enter an alliance to gain the expertise of another university through faculty exchange.

3. **Strategic enhancement** involves strengthening organisational capacity for service delivery as a means of surviving as an organisation and strengthening its strategic position. In an increasingly competitive market schools may increase their marketability by offering a wider service to faculty and students through international alliances. Such an increase in its breadth of service may increase its appeal to prestigious faculty and applicants seeking a global experience.

4. **Operational efficiency** involves improving productivity relative to the available resources in service delivery and/or ongoing operations. E.g., an organisation may wish to improve the use of resources by avoiding duplication of services.

5. **Environmental validity** has the goal of bolstering legitimacy with external, institutional stakeholders, e.g., funding agencies or accrediting bodies. The accrediting body for U.S. baccalaureate and masters offered by educational institutions is CSWE, which uses its EPAS to accredit these programmes. As noted above, CSWE's recent EPAS draft statement makes explicit and implicit reference to the importance of preparing social workers with global awareness and a commitment to global participation (CSWE

2008). In short, the environmental validity of U.S. schools of social work is enhanced by their international activities.

6. Domain influence is defined as a desire to increase an organisation's strength and/or control in order to safeguard its interests. An alliance offers each organisation an opportunity to gain resources, thereby increasing its power. The clearest example of domain influence is seen in coadunation, which occurs through a merger or consolidation designed to create one larger and more powerful organisation.

Phases of Partnership Development

Bailey and Koney present an alliance development framework comprising four developmental phases: (1) assembling the member organisations, (2) ordering the alliance, (3) performing the tasks and (4) transforming the alliance. The initial phase, assembling, occurs when partner organisations explore the possibility of an alliance, even before any formal sitting down together. It includes discussion of motivators, benefits as well as risks. In the second phase, ordering the alliance, members discuss and plan operating issues involving their autonomy and integration. One key issue at this time is developing sufficient trust to continue building the alliance. Having clearly understood the costs and benefits of the alliance, focus is now on the third phase, namely performing the tasks. The final phase, transforming the alliance, occurs when members reassess their commitment to the alliance and determine next steps. This final phase usually is precipitated by a specific event or guideline, e.g., reaching a goal. Three issues that require attention at each of the four phases are developing and maintaining trust, maintaining commitment, and continuous monitoring of the alliance.

Using Evaluation to Enhance and Extend the Alliance

The last stage in the Bailey and Koney model is the systematic collection of information for measurement and improvement. The focus is on evaluating the extent to which alliance goals have been achieved. The evaluation approach proposed is Participatory Action Research, an approach that brings the alliance members into the evaluation process at the start. Evaluators and participants co-create the direction and design of the evaluation process. Together they develop an infrastructure for designing and evaluating the alliance progress as it moves through developmental stages.

Four questions are to be addressed at this last stage. (1) What is to be evaluated? (2) How will it be evaluated? (3) How will the data be analysed? (4) What will be done with the findings? As in Participatory Action Research (Wise and Fine 2004), those affected by the evaluation are actively involved in shaping and implementing these decisions, from the development of the evaluation goals to the dissemination of findings.

The Model Applied: Case Illustrations

This section illustrates the models of the different forms of alliance discussed above using examples from the literature and our own experience at Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service. While social work educational alliances often appear to include features of more than one model, their major features help to place them in one category or another.

Examples from the Literature

Cooperation: The alliance between the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at Eotvos Lorand University (ELTE) in Hungary and the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences At Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) in Ohio, evidences the features primarily of cooperation with some aspects of coordination. This project's primary goal of exchanging curriculum knowledge and teaching expertise through the exchange of educators demonstrates an alliance of cooperation. The exchange visits over a period of several years helped to enrich the curriculum and scholarship at both Universities (Hokenstad 2003). Further, the alliance required low levels of organisational interdependence. The broader context, within which the programme operated, however, does show some features of coordination.

Coordination: The Tunghai University, Taiwan, and San Jose State University alliance includes the basic features of a coordination model (Lee 2003). The presidents of the two universities signed a written contract. There was a mutual effort to enhance curriculum and exchange faculty and students, and to have the joint sponsorship of research and conferences involving social welfare personnel. Each partner maintains its autonomy, subsidising its own personnel involved in the project.

Collaboration: The programme of the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of the West Indies (UWI), in Jamaica and the

University of Connecticut School of Social Work includes several components typical of the collaboration model (Maxwell and Healy 2003). This collaboration featured a shared interest in West Indian migration, increased publication and research, and the University of Connecticut's goal of expanding service to the Caribbean American population in Connecticut. The ongoing exchange of faculty and students, seminars and workshops offered to practitioners, sharing of teaching materials, curriculum development, joint research and presentations at conferences, joint publications, and a credit providing study tour have enriched both the institutions. The alliance partners have gained access to publication and conference presentation opportunities, and created a new social work journal. Both the institutions have increased their national and regional status and enhanced faculty productivity. This alliance exemplifies collaboration in several ways. The partners have jointly created shared goals, a strategy for working together, a broad perspective, continuous partnering, and have created a separate entity, i.e. a new journal to expand their publication options.

Coadunation: While we know of no programme which has yet reached this level of partnering, the continued growth of globalisation may well lead to this form of alliance.

The Fordham University-HUE Experience

This section describes an unsuccessful attempted alliance between Fordham University and Hanoi University of Education (HUE). The two institutions first established contact in early 2005. At that time HUE Dean of Special Education contacted one author at the Fordham University (FU) seeking assistance in developing a masters level social work programme at HUE. Through ongoing email exchanges, they agreed to further explore developing an alliance in face-to-face meetings at HUE. Further exchanges led to a one-week meeting in Hanoi in 2006, which included HUE administrators and faculty, and the two authors.

As the Bailey and Koney model suggests, the HUE-FU alliance discussed falls between cooperation and coordination, with hallmark features of each. If funding were secured, we planned to move toward the next level of alliance, namely collaboration. At that point, the alliance would have included several features of collaboration. Each partner was to relinquish some autonomy to achieve the central purpose of preparing HUE faculty to

prepare and deliver a graduate social work programme. The requirement of external funding to support this alliance mandated each organisation to lose some autonomy in such areas as assignment of its faculty, meeting of deadlines, and producing ongoing required project reports. Decision-making was to involve both partners as well as funding bodies, which would affect the functioning of each member. Both organisations shared responsibility for regularly providing and disseminating information and jointly coordinating meetings and activities. Since FU was the organisation, which agreed to seek external funding for the collaboration, it would have direct access to resources and, therefore, more power. This partnership design is a more structured alliance with high levels of organisational integration and formalisation, which include two organisations and funders. While the overriding organisation value certainly includes some self-interest, there is the broader goal of strengthening the international connections of both the nations involved.

As the Bailey and Koney model suggests, with funding, the HUE-FU experience would exemplify a collaborative model in several additional respects. Administration would be formal with an official governing body consisting of alliance administrators and an advisory group. This governing body would have some influence over some members of both organisations. Tasks were to be divided based on formal agreements made by the two organisations and funders. There would be several environmental linkages, most importantly with external funders, but also with others such as Vietnamese social service organisations. There would be agreed upon contact needed to share information and to meet contracted obligations. The alliance duration would be formally set, again by the parties and funders, with both the alliance members obligated by written agreements to adhere to formalised decisions.

Justification: Bailey and Koney note the importance of clarity in understanding each organisation's justification for entering an alliance. Several of the justifications that they present are relevant in this proposed collaboration. This alliance was seen as offering resource interdependence, providing each partner with the opportunity to acquire resources that would improve each organisation's ability to achieve its service objectives. It would provide HUE with a cohort of professionally educated social workers prepared to develop and deliver a masters level of social work education. For the faculty and students of both the institutions, this collaboration would

enhance mutual understanding. Further, it would enhance cultural sensitivity in HUE's working with minority groups in Vietnam, and FU faculty's preparation of students for work with the large New York immigrant population. For both the organisations, collaboration would result in an increase in cultural curriculum and resources.

Social responsibility also served as an impetus for both the organisations. Over the past decade, Vietnam has experienced dramatic social and economic changes including land distribution, increased domestic migration and urbanisation. These changes have resulted in an increase in poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, trafficking, "street children," and serious mental and physical health issues. There are few professionally educated social workers who can respond to these emerging problems. Further complicating the situation few social work education programmes exist to prepare professionals for this work. The Vietnamese government now seeks to eliminate poverty and its associated ills, and desires international cooperation and assistance. In recognition of Vietnam's social welfare problems, and the potential contribution professionally educated social workers can provide, it recently approved HUE's development of a masters social work programme. This alliance increased ability of the Vietnam government and HUE ability to meet community service needs through professionally educated social workers.

Strategic enhancement, a third relevant justification, involves strengthening organisational capacity for service delivery as a means of surviving as an organisation and strengthening its strategic position. This justification was relevant for both HUE and FU. This alliance would strengthen HUE by enabling it to greatly increase its breadth of service. From its focus on preparing students to serve as educators, it would now expand to prepare students for social work practice as well. FU would enhance its educational stature by further expanding its global activities. A growing number of US social work educational programmes are involved in global service, and this is increasingly a contributing factor to stature.

Environmental validity has the goal of bolstering legitimacy with external, institutional stakeholders, e.g., funding or accrediting bodies. Both the organisations would gain in this domain through increased visibility via presentations at conferences and publications related to cross-national collaboration. Further, HUE would gain from an ability to affiliate with

international social work organisations because of its ability to offer a masters social work degree.

The final justification, domain influence, is defined as a desire to increase an organisation's strength and/or control in order to safeguard its interests. Vietnam's impetus derived from the government's recognition of social welfare problems and its motivation to address these. Taking action by supporting this collaboration might raise Vietnam's stature in the world community. HUE's successful social work programme development might enhance its influence among other Vietnamese educational institutions, as well as its ability to influence social welfare policy in Vietnam. FU's participation might well add to its stature among U.S. social work educational institutions.

Phases of Partnership Development: The organisations spent considerable time in the early stage referred to by Bailey and Koney as assembling the member organisations. The two key participants, the Dean from HUE and the faculty member from FU maintained an ongoing contact through email and in person meetings while the Dean was on a Fulbright scholarship in New York, USA. The work on preparing grant applications moved the alliance into the second stage, namely ordering the alliance, as well as the third phase, using evaluation to enhance and extend the alliance. It was expected that the model would continue to offer guidelines for participation in both of these stages. However, the lack of funding, despite several attempts, prevented the further movement of this alliance at this time.

Conclusion

This paper represents an initial attempt to apply models of strategic alliances to cross-national transactions in social work education. Although it is primarily a descriptive paper, the authors attempted to illustrate how the use of conceptual models might help us to understand more fully the process of cross-national work, anticipate problems and opportunities, and plan for more effective and responsive partnerships. Future efforts must examine these and other models for strategic alliances to clarify their usefulness and to develop their applicability.

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MITRANIKETAN: A RURAL HERMITAGE

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Mitraniketan is a non-profit organisation, established in 1956 by K. Viswanathan a native of Vellanad in the district of Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala) and a Gandhian who was an active partaker in the Freedom Movement, for the uplift of the downtrodden in society. The organisation began as a small unit adjacent to the present Roman Catholic Church of the Mitraniketan campus, and was engaged in spinning with Thakkili and Charka which became the seed that gave shape to Mitraniketan. Today Mitraniketan crosses 52 years of its never ending quest for new approaches in community development.

The institution as a whole is considered to be an '*education based community engaged in imparting community based education*' which forms the central theme of Mitraniketan. As education is the main concern, Mitraniketan activities concentrate on imparting life centred education to school children, especially those from the marginalised sections. Various activities are initiated in order to make education meaningful, joyful and life oriented. K. Viswanathan, the founder of Mitraniketan believes in all-comprehensive education, equipping students with the skills to face challenges and to be good Samaritans. Education, according to him, widens knowledge, opens new phases to community life, and strengthens community relations and general well-being.

BEGINNING OF MITRANIKETAN

After completing his school education Viswanathan decided to dedicate his life to the uplift of the marginalised people in the society. He was highly influenced by the teachings of Gandhi (especially on basic education), Tagore and the noted educationalist, Grundtvig of Denmark. He

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