Organizational Culture in Social Work Professional Education: A Case Evaluation

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Organizational Culture in Social Work Professional Education: A Case Evaluation

Susan E. Mason, PhD and Heidi Heft LaPorte, DSW

The call for further professionalization of the child welfare workforce has led a number of states to endorse and subsidize social work education for its child welfare workers (Jones & Okamura, 2000; Steib & Blome 2004). In these programs, full-time employees of child welfare agencies are required to accept student internships at social service agencies as part of social work education. In their roles as students, they face the challenge of adjusting to the norms and expectations of the internship site that may differ from the organizational culture of their child welfare agencies. This article focuses on the field work experiences of full-time child welfare employees assigned for masters-level social work education fieldwork at a hospital-based children's sex-abuse clinic.

The theoretical of perspective of organizational culture provides the framework that guides the analysis of the dynamics of the students, host staff, and other key players. Organizational culture is defined here as "the deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions and beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work" (Peterson & Spencer, 1991, p. 142). Organizational culture is operationalized by reviewing the verbal reports and the observed behavior of participants from the four groups involved in the field education site: the students, the host agency staff, the supervisors from the public child welfare agency assigned to monitor the students' progress, and the field education advisors from the schools. The working theme of this study is that each group came to the field education site with a set of values and expectations grounded in their experiences of their respective organizations. These values and expectations sometimes brought about conflicts among the groups. These conflicts were resolved with the help of the project evaluation team. The goal of the project evaluation team was to identify ways to improve masters-level social work field education for full-time child welfare workers.

The importance of organizational culture as an explanatory phenomenon emerged from the data collected for the project from students and staff from three organizations: 1) the child protection center (CPC) as the host agency for the student interns, 2) five schools of social work (SSW) considered for this discussion as one, i.e., the schools, and 3) the employing agency of the students, a large, public, child-welfare organization (PCW). The host site, the child protection center (CPC), is a combination forensic investigative center and counseling program for at-risk families. It is located in a densely populated area of a large city. The student interns at the child protection center (CPC) were full-time employees of the city's public child welfare agency (PCW) granted paid educational leave to pursue their masters degree in social work. The agency's (PCW) expectation was that the students would take forensic interviewing and counseling skills back with them when they returned to agency work. To help achieve this goal the PCW assigned supervisors to monitor the students' work and troubleshoot for problems.

The schools of social work typically assigned field advisors to the site whose responsibilities were to assure the quality of the field education for their students and to serve as liaison between the school and the host agency. As is usual, the host agency (CPC) assigned a field instructor to each student to guide the learning process and help students negotiate the expectations of the site. The unique aspect of this arrangement was a grant provided by the state's schools of social work consortium to fund a half-time field education coordinator who served as an on-site educator and advisor for the students. Funding for this position was called for by the schools and the PCW because both groups regarded this field education setting as a model program for training future child welfare employees in skills related to both child welfare and generic social work. The

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schools and the PCW had maintained a good working relationship through the consortium for the past several years and the host agency (CPC) was added for this project.

Internships require a certain amount of adjustment and navigation that students must make to be successful at field education sites. For the child welfare worker students the work of the host agency was closely related to that of the PCW, where they were viewed as better-than-average employees. However, their student status at the CPC demanded that initially they see themselves as learners rather than as experts. It was likely easier for these students to take the learner role in the classroom setting than in a child protection center where there were familiar tasks. The goal of the evaluation study was to focus on the students' educational outcome, but as the data were reviewed the importance of organizational culture emerged as the most important aspect of the experience for participants from all three institutions. In this way two questions guided both the evaluation and this article: 1) How did differences in organizational culture affect the educational experience? 2) to what extent were the participating organizations able to learn from the experiences of the first year to make improvements? The importance of giving public child welfare workers the best possible social work field education experience was the driving force behind the project.

An Overview

Child welfare agencies have utilized the funding from Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to create education-incentive programs to make their work force both more professional and more stable. (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Rose, 1999; Scannapieco, Bolen, & Connell, 2000). Employing agencies have offered to subsidize workers' education and in return ask for a commitment of continued employment. This arrangement requires collaboration between the employing agency and the departments and schools of social work. The fieldwork sites have not received much attention by the employing agencies largely because they are viewed as being part of the educational program and, therefore, the responsibility of the schools. When the employing agency is large, students may do their fieldwork in that part of the agency where they do not work as employees. When the student's fieldwork is outside of the employing agency, at least three organizations are involved: the employing agency, the fieldwork site, and the social work school. White there is currently no way of knowing how many three-way arrangements exist nationally, it is fair to speculate that as the cost of social work education rises, workers will more often look to employers to fund their graduate studies.

Social work researchers have examined the organizational relationships between social service agencies and schools. The studies are diverse, lack replication, and do not provide definitive conclusions, but they do address organizational culture. In one study of a school district where public school educators and child welfare caseworkers disagreed on how best to serve children in foster care, focus groups helped promote improved communication. Students, educators, and caseworkers identified areas of conflict, and suggested that staff from each agency learn the laws and rules pertaining to the other institutions to avoid misunderstandings (Altshurler, 2003). Bogo and Globerman (1999) looked at the collaborative and reciprocal relations between schools of social work and fieldwork agencies to determine if more formal ties between the two resulted in greater reciprocity. They reported a limited degree of success when there were ongoing inter-organizational relationships between staff members of the schools and the agencies. Alperin (1998) did not find the degree of coordination between the schools and agencies to make an important difference when student satisfaction in child welfare field placements was considered. Inter-agency and interdisciplinary collaboration models based on literature reviews and field studies suggest that commonness of goals, communication styles, and successful histories of past collaborations may be helpful in bringing about im-

proved relations between agencies and schools (Bronstein, 2003; Wimpfheimer, Bloom, & Kramer, 1990).

Social work educators have alluded to "an increasingly adversarial climate" that is present today between schools of social work and social welfare agencies (Reisch & Jarman-Rohde 2000, p. 208). They attribute this, in part, to the changing nature of schools of social work, where agencies may be viewed more as settings for providing research income than for educating students for practice. On the part of agencies, their staff cite increased concern for economic viability that may predominate over the education of students. Lager and Cooke Robbins (2004) describe what they view as the "widening disconnect that currently exists between social work programs and the practice community" (p. 7). In their editorial they cite a growing withdrawal of schools of social work resources and prestige away from fieldwork education in favor of research, the pressures to publish, and changes in curricula influenced by special interest groups.

For the most part, the studies and editorials on fieldwork education address a dyad -- the relationship between schools and agencies (Alperin, 1998; Bogo & Globerman, 1999; Lager & Cooke Robbins, 2004; Reisch & Jarman-Rohde, 2000) or groups within agencies (Altshurler, 2003). The three-way model, grounded on a growing trend toward part-time and employer-paid graduate social work education, is less often discussed (Mason, 2002; Mason, 2003).

Program Evaluations and Monitoring Degrees of Change

Most studies of programs are cross-sectional designs with suggestions for change. Subsequent follow-up evaluations are common, but they are difficult to find in the literature and rarely are the implementation of these suggestions written up for publication. Exceptions include the work of Garcia and Floyd (2002), who assessed how social work programs integrated outcome data into their curricula, and Velasquez, Kuechler, and White (1986), who tracked how a three-year out-

come evaluation system resulted in the need to train decision makers in how to best use data for their social service agency. Implementing recommended changes from evaluations and utilizing research in social service agencies can be problematic. Anderson (2001) identifies organizational constraints that limit the use of findings and collaboration with researchers. Moxley and Manela (2000) suggest ways that agencies can best use evaluation results to make needed changes. Both recognize that organizational culture places serious obstacles in the paths of agencies wishing to make good use of evaluation reports.

The limited published research on the effectiveness of the evaluation process speaks to a need for work in this area. This study looks at the first year's findings and at the responses during the second year of the fieldwork host agency, the employing agency, and the schools.

THE EVALUATION

Method

The case-study approach outlined by Creswell (1998) calls for a bounded system with interactions among people living or working within the boundaries. The Child Protection Center (CPC) as the host site is the focal point of the fieldwork education system that includes the three organizations -- the CPC, the Public Child Welfare Agency (PCW), and the schools. The unique data that emerges from interviews and observations of the fieldwork system make this an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995).

The design: A similar study design was used for the two years, the only difference being fewer CPC staff interviews were conducted for the second year because of time constraints. The outcome measures were linked with the educational goals established by the social work field educators who were in turn linked with the funding source, the Social Work Education Consortium. Goals included training student interns to conduct forensic interviews, assess the needs of children and their families, and provide counseling and education to children and families when needed.

Students were also to become skilled in accessing social services for clients, including compensation from the local Crime Victims Board. The expectation was that students would take these skills back with them to PCW, thereby enriching the agency with highly trained professionals in the area of child sex abuse. The goal of the initial evaluation report was to assess the extent to which goals had been met, and to suggest ways to achieve any unmet goals for the second year. The second-year evaluation was to determine the extent to which problems found in the first year were successfully addressed.

The evaluation design consisted of five components: 1) interviews with key CPC professional staff, 2) a focus group interview with students, 3) interviews with PCW program designated staff, 4) interviews with schools of social work field liaison staff, and 5) follow-up interviews with the former student interns six months after their graduation and return to PCW.

Implementation: The implementation went as planned. The CPC, PCW, and schools of social work staff received the open-ended questions in advance which allowed them time to provide thoughtful responses. The students were not given the questions in advance because it was thought that this might inhibit their focus-group interactions. All respondents were advised of the voluntary nature of the study as was mandated by the internal review boards of the involved institutions.

Data analysis: The data were qualitative. They were analyzed by first creating transcripts from the interviews and focus groups, coding according to the constant-comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the three-tier coding methods that systematically choose open, axial, and selective categories (Miles & Huberman, 1995). The authors reviewed the categories, first independently and then as a team. All themes presented emerged inductively from the data.

Finding

The findings from both years indicated that all groups -- the CPC, PCW and SSW staff, and the

students -- described the project in positive terms. At the same time, they reported notable problems. The students and the CPC staff disagreed on matters related to responsibilities, resources, and professional behavior. Staff members from both the PCW and the schools found themselves caught in the middle of these disagreements and tried to maintain neutral positions. Most project participants thought that these differences were what they called "group interests," although some also noted personality clashes.

Group Interests as Organizational Cultural Differences

Despite the participants' views that the lack of accord between the CPC staff and the students was based on group self-interests, a broader examination of the data led the authors to believe that organizational cultural differences were the underlying culprit. Interpretations of the data led to "theories or constructs in the literature" that were used to formulate a unique understanding of the phenomena, a process noted to be an accepted aspect of qualitative research (Creswell, 1995, p. 249). The framework of organizational culture, sometimes referred to as institutional culture (Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2000), was thought to be the best fit for interpreting what was reported by participants as group interests. The participants' perceptions of their organization's norms were accepted without further study of each organizational culture. The rationale for this was that this study was limited to the field education system as a case study and the real interest was in the participants' perceptions of their organization's norms and how these views contributed to their actions.

The First Year Findings

For the first year, the major issues of contention, which were enumerated by everyone involved -- students, CPC and PCW supervisors, and advisors from the schools -- concerned responsibilities related to time and resource utilization. The underlying themes throughout were differing beliefs over what constituted profession-

alism and respect.

The Conflict over Responsibilities

Students and CPC staff held different expectations about time utilization at the CPC fieldwork site. Students, as employees of PCW, believed that they should have a fixed schedule for their time spent at the site similar to their schedule at PCW. This would include time allocations for lunch breaks and required paperwork. The CPC staff, accustomed to working in a hospital culture where immediate client needs predominate, thought the students' requests were often unreasonable. "If a family and a child appear at 4:00 PM we stay until they are cared for even when the center is scheduled to close at 5," stated one CPC staff member, who was dismayed that anyone would not hold a similar view.

The students' position was that they were willing to meet emergencies but wanted a structured schedule that assigned them to emergency cases on a rotating basis. The students interpreted the lack of such a schedule as an indication of disrespect. The feeling of being disrespected was pervasive and did not apply only to the time commitment. Students perceived many of the CPC professional staff as having a negative attitude toward their work at PCW and toward PCW in general. The idea that they were being disrespected created among the first-year students feelings of alienation, which helped create "acting-out" behavior at the site. One student summed up the idea that most students held:

"They [CPC staff] don't understand how things work at PCW. They should make an effort to understand us. We feel disrespected."

A further complication was the rule that PCW required student/employees to pick up their pay checks in person on Friday afternoons. The need for the students to leave the site early on Friday afternoons exacerbated the conflict about time. The CPC is located about an hour's ride by public transportation from PCW's main offices, and by leaving with enough time to arrive before 5:00 PM, the students created a serious reduction in site personnel for that afternoon. CPC staff suggested that a more adaptable plan for students to receive their checks be worked out, and they asked the PCW supervisors to intervene. The PCW supervisors sympathized with the plight of the CPC staff but did not think they had the power to make the change. As one PCW supervisor stated, "If the students put in their required hours, we can't argue with them." She further pointed out that the students belonged to unions and that she was not willing to make this a union issue. Schools of Social Work advisors took the same position that students needed only to put in their required number of hours, and that the CPC had to work within these time boundaries. The conflict about time brought frustration to most key project members. It was partially resolved when the students began taking a more flexible position on lunch and exit hours and with the CPC staff creating structured schedules for the students. Both groups made concessions but not without feeling that the other was not sufficiently flexible. The students realized that their dual roles as students and employees required adaptations, but they expressed resentment because they felt disrespected. Some members of the CPC staff also expressed feelings of not being respected based on their own work schedules. They sometimes missed lunch or had to leave late. In the end, both the CPC and PCW supervisors agreed that they needed a more structured program and an orientation to inform students early on as to what was expected. The CPC staff was especially interested in finding students who would be easily adaptable to the clinic's culture.

The Resources Conflicts

The resources conflict was focused on three finite commodities, 1) space, 2) computers, and 3) a book. All groups were aware of these issues, but each reacted with varying levels of intensity.

Space and Computers

Most student work took place in a facility where there was not enough office space and an insufficient number of computers when all five interns were present. This paucity of computers

became an issue because students were expected to write and file their notes electronically. At their jobs at PCW they each had their own computer and this contributed to their discontent. Sharing offices to see clients had a similar effect. The contrast between the limited resources allotted to them as students and what they were used to having as employees was viewed as another sign of disrespect.

The CPC professional staff reacted to these complaints with surprise. In their experience, students' expectations of resources had always been on the low side. Repeatedly, they said, "When I was a student we were happy to have…." indicating that resources for students are typically lacking. One professional staff member asked, "Why don't they [the students] bring their own laptops to work?" When asked how students reacted to that suggestion, she responded,

> "Very poorly. I know they have laptops at home, I even heard them say so, but they won't bring them in."

The CPC staff viewed accommodation and flexibility from the students as a sign of a good work ethic, respect for the agency, and most importantly, professional behavior.
One student did bring in her computer, but the others resisted, again focusing on the theme of disrespect. They thought that by bringing in their own computers they would be condoning what they perceived as their bad treatment.

The Book

The conflict over the book was most interesting because at first glance it seemed irrational on both sides. One CPC staff person asked the students to purchase a book on cognitive therapy to be worked on in supervision. The book, a paperback, was relatively inexpensive and the CPC supervisor saw this as a reasonable request. To her great surprise, the students refused to buy the book stating that the agency should supply it for them. This brought about a standoff between the supervisor and the students. The supervisor refused to give supervision on cognitive therapy

without the book, and the students were angry that they were not getting the help they needed. When the researchers appeared on the scene, it seemed as though there were a line drawn in the sand. Again, both the students and CPC staff felt disrespected. In this case, the students' educational experience was at risk but neither the PCW supervisors nor the school advisors thought they could intervene, nor were they willing to. Getting the book from a library was an option that one student took, but no student bought the book.

The intensity of feelings related to the book conflict is illustrated by the comments given below. The CPC supervisor who initially asked the students to buy the book:

> "It is incredible to me that they refuse to buy the book. I have never worked with students who wouldn't invest in their learning."

One student:

> "I want to learn CBT [cognitive behavioral therapy] and it is not about the money. It is about how we are treated. We are working for their clients; they should give us what we need to do the job."

The director's response when asked why the field site did not supply the book was that no money had been allocated in the budget for this year but it was something to consider for future years. She was, however, displeased at the students' behavior regarding the book, and thought that their stance was jeopardizing their work at the clinic.

Defining Professionalism

A key theme in the conflicts was that the two groups did not agree on the definition of professionalism. For the students, professionalism was identified with receiving respect from the agency staff. For them, this meant that they would have sufficient resources to complete their assignments, have more control over their time, and have their concerns listened to at meetings. The CPC staff wanted to be viewed by students as well-trained professionals who were dedicated to teaching, to making assessments, and to counsel-

ing related to child sex abuse. They expected students to treat them as respected supervisors and mentors, and were both dismayed and in some cases angry when this did not occur. The PCW supervisors were not pleased with how the students were conducting themselves at the agency, but they agreed with the students that the program did not always support student needs. They suggested improved scheduling to give students more autonomy in planning their day. A PCW staff supervisor noted that a detailed schedule and list of responsibilities for each student would go a long way toward making students feel important to the agency. She stated, "Something as simple as that really makes a difference. It is just efficiency but it takes on a whole different light."
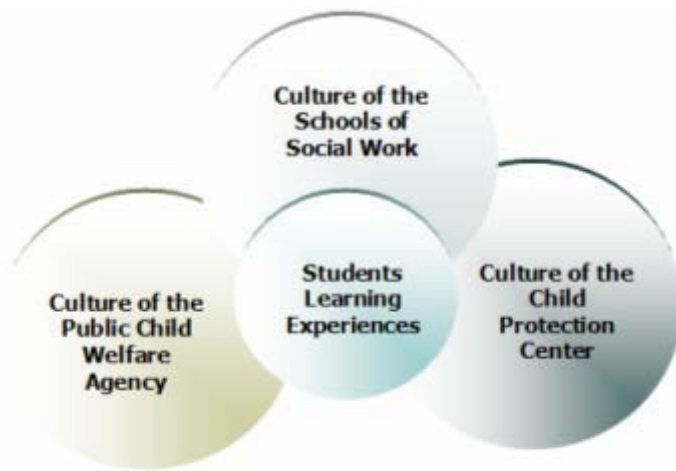
The schools of social work (SSW) advisors wanted the students to be respectful of the CPC staff but they also wanted to protect their students' rights. They thought students needed space to see clients, and more time and computer access for writing up notes. The extent to which they were involved with the site varied from school to school. The social work advisors seemed to agree on one key area, namely, that the students were competent workers at PCW and had much to offer the site staff, if given the opportunity. They thought that CPC supervisors needed to be more

receptive to the students as experienced workers.

Lessons from the First Year

The first-year evaluation brought to light the feelings of being disrespected that both the students and the CPC staff shared. Poor communication and the controversies over resources helped fuel these feelings. The CPC staff, through their own insight, and through discussions with the PCW supervisors and evaluation project researchers, realized that changes were needed to avoid the same problems for the second year. The first-year evaluation report described these issues and suggested organizational changes that addressed time and resource allotment. The report supported the CPC staff's ideas of a summer orientation for new students, and on-going forums throughout the year to enhance communication. The report was distributed to the CPC program director, the PCW field director, and selected schools personnel before the beginning of the second project year. The students, who had graduated and returned to their positions at PCW, did not receive the report. It was thought at the time that because they had agreed to participate in a follow-up study, the report might bias their responses for that study.

The Second Year

The second evaluation of the 2004-2005 academic year showed improvement in key areas. Student selection followed a more highly scrutinized protocol, a summer orientation served to acquaint students with the site and their responsibilities, and the program was reorganized making the scheduling more amenable to student needs. The orientation gave the CPC staff an opportunity to get to know the students and assess their abilities for placement within the program. Sections of the book were distributed to the students to avoid the problem about buying the book. The PCW staff began early

Figure 1. Organizational Cultures Influencing Students' Learning Experiences

monitoring and counseling of students when needed, in order to head off problems. The schools' field advisors were not all the same people from the previous year, and so they, as a group, had less awareness of potential difficulties.

Disrespect remained a salient issue for the second year but it was expressed mostly by the students and it had a different source. Instead of feeling personally disrespected, students reacted to what they perceived as a de-valuation of all PCW workers and, in some cases, poor minority families. The second-year focus group reported feeling that the PCW was devalued by some CPC staff. As a reaction to this, one student stated, "When they disrespect any of the [PCW] workers they disrespect us. We are [PCW]." The second-year students thought that the CPC staff members were not sufficiently sensitive to the difficult living conditions experienced by many of the poor, minority clients. One stated that as a person of color herself, she felt disrespected when she overheard what she interpreted as a negative comment about a client's family. Focus group members agreed with this student's comment but when asked if they had spoken up about this, they said that they had not. "We really should have and we should now," one student stated, "especially as we are not on their payroll."

Students would not supply further details except to say they were all alerted to this problem that had occurred in multiple circumstances. The confidential nature of the focus group prevented the researchers from investigating these concerns with the CPC staff. In fairness to the CPC staff, the researchers found no corroborative data from interviews with CPC staff to support the students' assertions that disrespectful statements were made about the work at PCW and about economically disadvantaged, minority families. It was the case, however, that all of the students were from minority groups while only one of the CPC staff members was a person of color.

Another matter that had been alluded to by the first-year students but stated emphatically by the second-year group was the concern that they would not have the opportunity to use the skills they had learned at the CPC once they returned to their PCW jobs. These skills included cognitive therapy as well as forensic interviewing for child sex abuse. The question the students had was this: "If we won't be able to use these skills, why are we here?" The reality was that because each student was placed in a different job and area of the PCW, how the skills and knowledge gained at the site would be utilized was unknown.

The controversy over resources seemed to have abated in the second year. The readings on cognitive therapy in lieu of the book helped avoid that problem, and improved scheduling and better utilization of the available space helped alleviate tension. There were fewer student complaints about space and time but students did not always feel welcome. One student asked,
"Did they know we were coming? Did they really want us here?" She and others thought that the negative feelings about PCW were so strong that, as student/employees, they did not always feel comfortable.

The CPC staff seemed more at ease with the second-year group of students. They stated that they liked them personally but there were problems. One area of frustration was repeated absences caused by uncontrollable circumstances. Two students were hospitalized for illnesses, and one had serious family problems. This took time away from the clinic and clients. The CPC staff noted with concern that often the students who were absent did not contact families to reschedule counseling appointments. Even when they did phone clients, the absences were often so pervasive that it made the therapeutic relationship unworkable. CPC staff thought students were not taking their professional responsibilities seriously enough and were disregarding the agency's mission of service.

PCW supervisors were not sympathetic with the CPC staff's discomfort over student absences. Their attitude about absences was this: "Yes, they were unfortunate but they were also unavoidable." Supervisors said that they had to follow union rules, which provided the students with sick

leave and personal time. They were pleased that in the second year fewer clashes occurred between students and CPC staff, and that at-work scheduling and space did not appear to be major problems during this second year. And they were not hearing about the book! They did not report knowing about CPC statements that denigrated the work of the PCW nor did they say anything about discriminatory remarks.

The schools of social work advisors were in agreement that the placement had much to offer in terms of knowledge and skills. They thought the supervision was excellent and, as a group, they gave the program an overall excellent grade. Where they did not agree, depending on the school and the student, was whether the students were sufficiently able to meet the expectations of the CPC site staff. School advisors thought that some students were not up to the learning pace that the site required. For these students, additional patience was needed. All school advisors thought that these students, as PCW employees, required special attention in adapting to an agency where the culture of work differed from what they were accustomed to. Two advisors commented about two different students:

> "She had certain habits, and I mean habits, not skills, that had to be broken and this took a very long time."

> "This particular student was very solid and mature, which is good, but also very set in her ways."

All advisors were supportive of their students but with one exception: they did not appear to be well acquainted with the CPC site and the key staff.

The Third Interrupted Year

The third year was scheduled to be the final year of the funding and project evaluation cycle, although the project may have continued if it had not been unexpectedly aborted by the PCW administration. A crisis, precipitated by a child's death in another section of PCW service, resulted in the students being recalled at mid-year to their positions at PCW.

The students and the director of CPC were contacted by telephone after the project ended to ascertain how the third year had gone. Both the students and the director were very positive about the student-training project. The PCW students reflected positively on the forensic interviewing and the cognitive therapy skills they had learned. They enthusiastically described the excellent supervision and support they received. The director stated that the third-year students were intent on learning and a pleasure to have at the site. She attributed this to a rigorous selection process, a more highly structured program, and lessons learned from the first two years.

The Follow-Up Study

PCW students were contacted six months after graduating and returning to their respective full-time jobs. Of the ten former students in the first and second year group, two had been promoted to supervisory positions and two were transferred to what they viewed as better positions. Three ex-students expressed varying degrees of frustration at not being able to utilize their knowledge and skills learned at the site and in school. One had not yet graduated and was still in school, one left the agency, and one could not be reached. Overall, the results were mixed and at least some of the students' concerns about returning to "the same old job" actually occurred in the first six months out of school.

Summary and Discussion

The field site's participants, its conflicts and resolutions, all suggest the framework of organizational culture. Post positivism acknowledges that research is never value free and that there may be more than one possible interpretation of phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It would be difficult to "tell the story" without such a theory that serves to bring the disparate pieces of information together in a way that can be understood (Heineman Pieper, 1981). In this case study, the organizational cultures of the three institutions converged at the host site and framed participants' views on communications, behavior, inter-

actions and practices. Non-host site participants repeatedly compared the expectations of the CPC with their perceptions of their own work organizations, the PCW, and the schools. The CPC staff defended their agency's rules and expressed frustration that students and staff from other organizations did not fully support them. The participants varied in their ability to "see the big picture," but even the most astute framed their beliefs in terms of how they viewed the culture of their own organization.

The story inevitably focuses on the students, who as full-time employees of the public child welfare agency (PCW) were pursing a graduate degree in social work while on full salary. Faced with a different status and setting the students did not always adapt well. Their difficulties with the CPC staff were most often expressed as feeling disrespected as individuals and sometimes as persons of color. The move from the tangible issues of time and space allotment to the more elusive concept of respect illustrates the omnipresence of the organizational culture factor. When the student stated, "When they disrespect PCW they disrespect us," she alludes to the centrality of the organization in the everyday discourses that occur between students and CPC staff. Of course, there is no way of knowing that CPC staff expressed this sentiment -- they emphatically denied disrespect for PCW during interviews -- nonetheless, the perception was held by the students. It was also clear that the students were not at all certain that the knowledge and skills they were learning at the CPC would be of use to them when they returned to work at the PCW. This feeling was, in part, validated by the follow-up interviews.

The CPC staff found it difficult to adapt to the employee/students. They were accustomed to the more traditional student, one with little or no agency experience who could be easily sculpted to fit the organization's norms. The PCW supervisors and the schools' advisors found themselves caught in the middle. The PCW supervisors defended both the culture and the union rules of their child welfare agency, and at the same time encouraged students to be more open to the ex-

pectations of the CPC. School advisors who visited the site once or twice during the two semesters were less involved with the day-to-day issues. Their concerns focused making sure that students received the appropriate educational content, sufficient caseloads, and the supervision that their curricula demanded. They occasionally voiced concern about an individual student's ability to perform the emotionally taxing CPC work, but their interventions were sporadic at best.

The programmatic changes suggested by the first-year evaluation included scheduling and resource accommodations for students, and a summer orientation designed to provide the CPC staff and the students an opportunity to discuss their respective needs. The first year project evaluation report recommended enhanced communication and group exchanges that were built into the second-year program. It appeared that the first-year evaluation effected important program modifications that were implemented in the second year, but this was not formally assessed. In the third truncated year, all aspects of the program seemed to improve albeit with limited data to verify the progress.

Finally, the growth of part-time and non-traditional social work graduate education calls for different educational models. It cannot be assumed that students who are also employees will always fit the malleable student role. Student/employees require attention to the experiences they bring with them to internships. The importance of respect in the social work field educational process cannot be overstated.

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