Collaborations in Early Child Care and Education: Establishing a Framework for a Research Agenda

May 24-25, 2010
Washington, DC

Meeting Summary
Final Draft

PURPOSE AND GOALS

What was the purpose of this meeting?
Collaborations in early care and education are common at the state, local, and program levels and these collaborations are increasing in their scope and complexity, leading to challenges for researchers and evaluators. For example, it is increasingly difficult to answer such seemingly simple questions as, where do children spend their time, and how effective are the programs that serve them? With collaboration across programs, it also becomes difficult to measure the activities, outputs, and outcomes related to a single program. Moreover, the effectiveness of collaborating programs may reflect more than the sum of the effectiveness of the individual programs, thus necessitating the measurement of the collaborative processes themselves. Given the myriad challenges, the overall goal of this workgroup meeting was to construct a framework for research and evaluation regarding collaborations in early care and education.

What do we mean by collaboration?
Collaboration in early care and education can mean various things, and there are many important questions for research and evaluation regarding all aspects of collaboration. For example, collaboration can take place at the state, local, or program level. For the purpose of this meeting, we focused on state-level collaborations in early education, particularly collaborations among child care, Head Start, pre-k, early intervention, and early childhood special education. Furthermore, collaboration can refer to the process of collaborating or to the collaborative institution. For the purpose of this meeting, we focused on the process of collaborating, defined by Gray (1989) as "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible."

What was discussed?
The participating federal agencies sought to be informed about what is known, what needs to be known, and the appropriate approaches to take to further research and evaluation in the field. Over the course of the first day of the meeting, participants discussed such topics as defining and measuring collaborations, studying the effects of collaboration on the individual collaborating programs, and understanding the parameters for examining links between collaboration and outcomes for children and families. Each session addressed the relevant measurement and design issues. To ensure relevance to policy and practice, the following questions were considered with each session: How can research help identify effective collaboration? What about these collaborations is effective? For whom are these collaborations effective? During the second day of the meeting, participants revisited issues discussed the previous day, discussed gaps in the research, and proposed next steps in the building of a research agenda.

What did we hope to get out of the meeting?
We expected that meeting participants would develop recommendations that would assist federal staff and researchers as they address important and timely policy-relevant questions related to collaborations in early care and education. We planned to produce and disseminate a meeting summary; we expected participants to discuss other specific products during the meeting.

SUGGESTED BACKGROUND READING

Coffman, J. (2007). *A framework for evaluating systems initiatives: Executive summary*. Build Initiative.
http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/BuildInitiativeExecutiveSummary.pdf

Kubisch, A. C., Weiss, C. H., Schorr, L. B., & Connell, J. P. (1995). Introduction. In J. P. Connell, A. C. Kubisch, L. B. Schorr, & C. H. Weiss (Eds.), *New approaches to evaluating community initiatives: Concepts, methods, and contexts* (pp. 1 – 21). Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/14/00/5d.pdf

MEETING SESSIONS

Welcome and Introductions
Kathleen Dwyer Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE)

Kathleen Dwyer opened the meeting by explaining that although there has been collaboration within the field of early childhood for many years, little research has been done on the effectiveness of collaboration. Previous descriptive research has shown us successful approaches to collaboration, but more research is needed to help identify effective collaborations: What about those collaborations makes them effective? How does one know when collaboration is effective? The purpose of the meeting is to develop recommendations to help researchers research collaboration in early childhood. For the purpose of this meeting, we will focus on the *process* of collaboration among *state-level* agencies in *early childhood* (e.g., child care, Head Start, pre-k, early intervention, and early childhood special education). There is a wide range of experts from different fields at the meeting to discuss these issues. The first day will cover topic-focused discussion and the second day will address gaps and next steps. After the meeting, a meeting summary will be developed, and participants may be contacted about materials discussed during the meeting.

Mary Bruce Webb, Director, Division of Child and Family Development, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE)

Mary Bruce Webb discussed the history of this meeting and the importance of cross-disciplinary participation in the meeting. Collaboration in early childhood education has become more common and diverse and it is important to get past the assumptions we have about collaborations and to think about how to research the process of collaboration.

Joan Lombardi, Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development, Administration for Children and Families

Richard Gonzales spoke on behalf of Joan Lombardi who was unable to attend the meeting. He discussed the importance of collaboration in early childhood, particularly when looking at systems of collaboration and systems integration. Currently the federal government is funding state advisory councils, which are intended to encourage collaboration. This meeting will help in determining how to evaluate the collaboration process, how to attribute causality and what funding streams are useful for collaboration.

Jacqueline Jones, Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Early Learning, Department of Education

Finally, Jacqueline Jones discussed the importance of research. The Department of Education has a birth though third grade agenda and collaboration is essential to this effort. Neither the Department of Education nor the Department of Health and Human Services can work without collaboration. There are different cultures in different departments, and departments have to come up with a shared definition of collaboration to make sure it is effective particularly when we are asking states to do more and more collaboration. The federal government needs to understand what effective collaboration is for example whether it is a shared mission or more than that? When is collaboration the best way to proceed? This is tremendously important at the federal level but also at the state and local level.

Setting the Context

Ann Reale, National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center

Ann Reale opened the session by explaining that the presentations in this session will set the context for the meeting and will clarify key questions. These questions included: What are the key policy considerations regarding collaboration in early care and education? Which questions are most critical to research in order to understand and improve early care and education systems? From an organizational perspective, what are the necessary elements of a theory of change regarding collaborative efforts in an early care and education systems initiative? From an individual/communications perspective, what dimensions define collaborative processes? This session will also provide a common starting point for meeting participants in thinking about collaboration.

Sharon Lynn Kagan, Teachers College, Columbia University

Sharon Lynn Kagan began her presentations by looking back and forward to set the context for the meeting. She explained that collaboration comes from the Latin words, com and labora, meaning coming together in labor. Collaborations are a relationship where two or more entities come together to work on a joint effort. There are many ways to collaborate, across programs, across systems, across departments, across fields and across classrooms. Researchers have spent time applying collaboration, distinguishing collaboration, theorizing about collaboration, terming collaboration and trying to understand collaboration. In order to move forward, there are five "what we must knows" about collaboration that need to be addressed.

1. "The Monster Needs Some Boundaries," in other words, before something can be researched, it needs to be defined. If collaboration is a process, to whom does it apply, what is the unit of analysis? What is collaboration and what makes it unique?
2. "What is the Magic?" Why are some collaborations successful and others not? Collaboration is both context and purpose dependent. How can some aspects of a successful collaboration be transferred to another collaboration? What is important at each stage of collaboration to make the overall collaboration successful?

3. "Let's Get Real." Is it really possible to study collaboration and will this research make a difference? Additionally, do we have the research tools and methods to measure the process variables?
4. "What is the real and appropriate endgame?" There is an assumption that collaboration will help children's outcomes, but is this appropriate? Do we really expect the administration of collaboration to impact the everyday lives of children? What should be the expected outcomes of collaboration in early childhood? Maybe looking at child and family outcomes is not appropriate.
5. "Are we on the mark?" Collaborations are context and person dependent. In 2010 and beyond, is collaboration a dated concept? Does the collaboration metric still hold and does collaboration get us to where we want to be?

Dr. Kagan continued by explaining that in order to move forward with collaboration research, we must define what we are investigating and decide whether the issue is worth knowing, if it is knowable and what we expect from it.

Julia Coffman, Harvard Family Research Project

Julia Coffman started her talk by discussing her background in early childhood and her work with the Build Initiative, which is a foundation-funded multi-state project to help states build collaboration. She began her presentation by introducing an Early Childhood Development System diagram, which consisted of four concentric ovals (early learning; health, mental health and nutrition; family support; and special needs/early intervention) and discussed how each oval is a system in itself as well as being part of a larger system of Early Childhood Development.

Based on her work, she came up with three questions that need to be answered in collaboration research. What is early childhood systems building? What are elements of a theory of change for early childhood systems building? Where does collaboration enter in? In order to answer these questions, she proposed a theory of change, discussing a system building sequence that assumes a better early childhood system will lead to better child and family outcomes. While this model seems simple, we often skip to better family and child outcomes before we look at the early childhood system and its ability to produce better outcomes. The system is incredibly important.

Dr. Coffman then discussed several components in thinking about what systems building is. The first is the context. Policies and funding must be changed to make sure that early childhood is a priority in the political arena. The second is components. Sometimes a systems problem isn't that it is not connecting; the system must include a comprehensive array of high quality services that children and families need. It is then important to make sure that the systems are connecting, that the system has supports to function effectively, with shared standards. In this sense, collaboration is central. The fourth component is infrastructure; the system must have supports to function effectively. Governance, training, quality improvement, longitudinal data tracking systems are essential. Finally, the last component to consider is scale. The system should be available to all children and families who need it. These efforts are not necessarily linear, and states may be working on them simultaneously.

Dr. Coffman ended her presentation with some expected system-level outcomes based on BUILD's work. Before child and family outcomes, system-levels outcomes need to be present. Then we can ask what should we expect as outcomes for children and what are appropriate expectations. She ended with the emphasis that collaboration is important in each of the areas we are working on. This helps us think about the research and evaluation questions required to demonstrate how the collaboration process effects the systems we are trying to build.

Darrin Hicks, University of Denver

Darrin Hicks began his talk by asking if we actually can study collaboration (Yes) and whether we can measure the process variables associated with collaboration (He hopes so). Collaboration is a problem solving process, a communication process and a structure process. It brings people together in new ways in order to invent novel solutions to problems. In terms of communication, collaboration is all about relationships. Different forms of communication need to be identified. Relationships within collaboration can be measured based on level of commitment. In his research, he is trying to understand the relationship between the quality of collaboration and outcomes at one to two years, and then again five years after the collaboration began. Based on his research, the key ingredient to collaboration is the commitment that stakeholders have. He looked at 52 highly successful collaborations and most had an open and credible process as well as a leadership that upholds that process. The key indicator appears to be a shift when participants stop thinking about their own organizations and start to think in terms of group identity.

Dr. Hicks then discussed the features of high quality collaboration. Taking from the procedural justice literature, fair process appears to be very important. This means that if participants believe the process is fair, they will accept the results even if they get less. If they deem it unfair, they will contest the process even if they receive more than they expect. This was demonstrated by a regional transportation study in Denver. Dr. Hicks discussed that we make fairness judgments based on the energy we sense in a collaboration and that we make fairness judgments that are quick, with little evidence, that are pivotal and almost impossible to change.

He then discussed the five features of a high quality collaboration process. The first is inclusiveness, which means that all those affected by a given problem are involved. People with different views and those with unusual ideas are included. The second feature of a successful collaboration is that all stakeholders are treated equally. The discussion is reoriented as necessary so that everyone feels equal. The third feature is that the collaboration is problem focused. Will this collaboration help impact the problem? Dr. Hicks next talked about the collaboration being authentic, that it has the power to make binding decisions and commitments. The collaboration must also be revisable. If any of the first four features need revisions, do we have the power to go back and revise the process?

Dr. Hicks concluded with a discussion of instruments to measure collaboration. There are scales that can assess each of the above mentioned features of collaboration. For example, authenticity can be measured by examining whether the group is able to make binding decisions. Using existing instruments, researchers can learn how to measure collaboration better. However, one must not lose sight of the relationship between collaboration and outcomes. Studies in Colorado found that process quality relates to sustained collaboration. Collaboration is also important for child and

family outcomes five and ten years after the collaboration in an evaluation of the nurse-family partnership program. Despite these outcomes, there is a lot of skepticism. David Olds (Nurse-Family Partnership) asked, "How can you tell that process variables had any relationship with the outcomes in children and families?" Dr. Hicks found that commitment is central, and that in successful collaboration, commitment transferred from the early stakeholder group to the advisory group and ultimately to agency culture. Nurses who saw the process as collaborative spent more time with clients and developed stronger relationships with clients. If we define collaboration a success by commitment, then commitment is important for outcomes. If those at the top are committed, the commitment trickles down to the practitioners at the ground. Quality outcomes are tied to relationships.

Brief discussion followed the presentations. Among the comments and questions posed by participants were the following:

- The importance of waiting several years after starting a collaboration to evaluate outcomes. This provides time to account for differences in political context and resources that might explain differences seen in outcomes.
- To be wary of tautological definitions of collaborations.
- Collaborations change over time and sustaining collaborations is difficult. The evaluation of collaborations over time might look different.
- The importance of considering the level of commitment of collaboration partners as well as the context in which the collaboration takes place.
- The importance of making sure the success of collaboration at the top makes its way to the program level.
- As studies of collaboration are designed, the unit of analysis (state, local) should be discussed.

Defining and Measuring State-Level Collaborations

Christy Kavulic, Office of Special Education Programs

Chirsty Kavulic introduced the session as a forum for defining and measuring collaboration. She explained that David Chavis would look at collaboration from a macro level, Jessica Sowa would look at collaborations from an organization level and Barbara J. Smith would look at collaborations from a micro level. The questions that were addressed in this session were: How do we know when collaborating is effective? How do we measure effective collaboration? Depending on the goals of collaborating, what are the processes that support capacity or create barriers? How do we measure these processes?

David Chavis, Community Science

David Chavis began his presentation by discussing his research. Collaboration is a broad term and we need to be specific about what we mean. State-level collaborations can transform systems. Research has focused on process and capacities among individual representatives, but research does not really look at the role of the people, i.e., who is involved in the collaboration (interns or chiefs). More needs to be known about who is at the table, and what happens at the table. There is very little

research on how collaboration process leads to actual results outside of advocacy for political change.

Dr. Chavis continued to explain that the basic idea (i.e., theory of change) is that collaborations are effective influences on state and local systems and this leads to increased scope, scale and sustainability of innovations. We do not know what about collaboration makes a difference in these changes. There are several reasons why collaborations may increase effectiveness: (1) Collaborations influence participating organizations and agencies. (2) They maintain and increase participation. (3) They influence the larger system. (4) They leverage resources (new and sustainable revenue, mobilizing constituencies). (5) They improve strategies and programs (successful innovation of strategies and programs). (6) They transform conflict (addressing the root of conflict in a manner that strengthens collaboration). (7) And they build capacity (organizational improvement, goal attainment). It is not about what member organizations do for the collaboration, but what the collaboration does for member organizations (where the transformation occurs). The collaboration may be the venue to strengthen organizations in collaboration. Although collaboration may feel like a paradox (e.g., it requires people and organizations with limited time and resources to commit themselves to another organization), successful collaborations can manage with healthy group process.

Jessica Sowa, University of Colorado Denver

Jessica Sowa began her discussion by asking what collaborations do for organizations that participate in them and what do these organizations need to bring to the table when engaging in a collaboration? Determining what is an effective collaboration is similar to measuring organizational effectiveness; there is no single measure of organizational effectiveness, with complex frameworks required. When studying collaboration, Dr. Sowa uses Gray's definition of effective collaboration. Collaboration can help people determine new ways to address social problems. People may have different views of a program, but collaboration allows them to develop deeper and shared definitions of the problem and shared solutions. It is also important to understand what participants want to derive from collaboration and what they contribute. What are the benefits and motivation for collaboration? What do organization participants contribute to the effectiveness of collaboration?

Dr. Sowa then discussed common motivations for engaging in the collaboration process. Those are: efficiency, stability, legitimacy, reciprocity and asymmetry. There may also be dual motivations of improving service delivery and drawing down broader organizational benefits. Participants will derive benefits for the services they deliver and for their own organization. Collaborating is effective when organizations are able to connect to the process and identify what benefits may result from their participation.

There are several variables that one can look at when studying participation in state-level collaborations. These include policy learning, a shared problem definition, access to new resources (money, knowledge, people) and an increased connectivity. Design features that increase effectiveness can also be examined. For example: Who are the key stakeholders and how are roles defined? Is there an agenda? What is the goal of the process? How are decisions made? What are

the rules for decision making? How is performance measured? All of these variables can be examined with both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Dr. Sowa then reviewed variables that might be used to examine participant capacity for collaboration, including organizational climate, organizational culture, and collaborative capacity. Organizational climate would include: are participants in the right place organizationally to engage in the collaborative process—are there no looming crises in the organization that would take away from their participation in the process? Organizational culture includes: How collaborative is the organizational culture? Are there aspects of the culture that would act as barriers? Collaborative capacity involves issues such as: Are staff allotted time to participate in the collaboration and is their participation in the collaboration valued by the organization? Organizational climate, culture and capacity are all variables that can be studied.

Dr. Sowa concluded her presentation by noting that a challenge is that these variables are both input and outcome—it will depend on what scholars and practitioners want to know about the effectiveness. In addition measuring effective collaboration requires some social construction—effectiveness depends on what you value about what is being measured. Developing common definitions of effective collaborating a priori to the collaboration can improve the evaluation process.

Barbara J. Smith, University of Colorado Denver

Barbara J. Smith began her talk by explaining that process variables at the team level are key to collaboration efforts, we need to get to what they are and tie these to outcomes. By effective collaboration, the real question is what is the intended outcome? Collaboration is not the intended outcome; it is a means to an end. It is only as good as the process it creates and the process needs to build trust and relationships. Process variables need to be researched to determine which are most effective; why is the team together? The collaboration meeting is the work environment for working together ("co-labor"). The question then becomes, how can the work environment be productive? Within collaboration it is important to think about who is on the team, who is convening the meetings and who is facilitating those meetings. Ground rules and norms must be agreed upon before successful collaboration can take place and often written rules are important and helpful.

Barbara J. Smith also discussed the importance of designing the work environment for the collaboration. For example, if collaboration meetings are too large, people will feel as though they can miss a meeting and their absence will not matter. Also, if members feel like they can send representatives to the meetings, they appear less committed and this may impinge on the collaboration efforts. Within collaboration meetings trust must be built, and therefore membership is important. Additionally, every meeting needs to be structured to be productive. Each member needs a role, and at the end of meetings member evaluation of productivity can be important and helpful as the collaboration moves forward. What strategies do we feel are useful? What did you think facilitated group decision making?

Dr. Smith asserted that all of these processes can be measured. Objectives and action plans can be looked at using qualitative methods such as content analysis. Effects on systems policies can be analyzed and effects on consumers can also be studied. These micro variables do matter but

workforce environment is a means to an end. There must be a balance between what makes the collaboration meeting effective and what makes it effective in attaining action plan and goals.

Discussion followed the presentations. Among the comments and questions posed by participants were the following:

- The lack of common measures for young children. It was suggested that a national policy/state-level area for data would be useful. Likewise, there is a need for population data.
- There might be another endpoint rather than collaboration. But we do not know because we need a way to measure outcomes rather than what we have. Why are we doing collaboration if it doesn't have an impact on children and families? Although this outcome is ambitious, it is very important.
- It was suggested that at the state level, the real outcome question may be: Does it produce change in the system? Perhaps instead of getting from a (inputs) to c (outcomes for children), we should consider it successful to get from a to b (intermediate outcomes that may relate to the collaboration and systems change). A single study will not get at all the nuances of collaboration in early childhood. Many studies are needed.
- Is it reasonable to expect collaboration can be linked to child outcomes? It may not be reasonable, but if it is not, is it worthwhile to study it?
- There appears to be a conundrum on how to get to practice from collaboration, but that should be the goal. Implementation science is important (measuring fidelity).
- There is an assumption that collaboration is a function of getting things done. It is naïve to think that we can get data and will see results, especially since data has not been linked reliably to outcomes in early childhood.
- Powers at the state-level may have limited power at the implementation level, e.g., Head Start and some child care policies (although states are getting better at logistics).
- Have collaborations made lists of federal regulations that stymie them? The federal government would like to know what barriers there are. However, it was noted that the tension can cut both ways, e.g., while federal child care funding is very flexible, states sometimes want federal direction so that things are more standard.
- It would be helpful to have a better descriptive map of what is going on (children and dollars) so we have a better picture of the operational linkages among funding streams.
- Is collaboration a human service management opportunity or a social change strategy?
- How can we reduce the power structure, race and culture differences in collaboration?
- Collaboration is voluntary (even if mandated). How can this be accounted for?

Working Lunch and Panel Discussion: Maryland

Facilitator: Jeff Capizzano, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development, Administration for Children and Families

Jeff Capizzano introduced this working lunch as a real world context for discussion on collaboration. Maryland has experienced a profound shift over the past few years, has a history of collaboration and a successful infrastructure to support the collaboration.

Rolf Grafwallner, Marcella Franczkowski, Valerie Kaufmann, Liz Kelley and Linda Zang, Maryland State Department of Education

Rolf Grafwallner began the presentation by explaining that Maryland is a small state with 24 jurisdictions. There is a large population of African-Americans, as well as increasing numbers of Hispanics and English Language Learners. The state provides public prekindergarten to children living under 185% the poverty line and these programs are run by local boards of education. Maryland also has local family support centers which provide child development programs, parenting classes and adult education programs on site. The state has several quality improvement initiatives as well. Everything in Maryland is standard based. This includes the early childhood curriculum project, child care credentialing, tiered reimbursement for child care, Head Start Collaboration, Maryland Model for School Readiness, Judy Center Partnerships and Extended Individualized Family Service Plans.

Marcella Franczkowski discussed the early intervention and special education system of services in Maryland next. When children turn three years of age, families are allowed to choose whether to keep an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or get an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This helps the state develop a birth through five initiative.

Rolf Grafwallner then discussed how in 2005 the Maryland state legislature decided to combine all early care and education programs into the Department of Education. Community advocates pushed for this change in order to develop the common goal of providing a quality education and safe environment for all children. Right after transfer into one department, the number of child care providers in the credentialing program increased dramatically in the state, and it became easier to resolve problems than before. The presentation covered how the collaboration got started, and whether children are better off as a result of the work that is going on.

Bringing all of the people together at the state-level made the difference in aligning services in the new department and improving services to children and families. The collaboration came up with three goals: expand the number of high quality programs, workforce development and outreach to communities. The biggest challenge was deciding a joint mission of the new department.

Rolf Grafwallner continued saying that if a parent can see the differences within a few years, then the state has made progress. Since there are 24 jurisdictions, localities can develop and customize their infant and toddler programs to serve local families. Head Start agreements with local boards of education can be customized to individual needs. The system leverages resources from strong interdepartmental coordination, from public-private partnerships and from strategic planning and implementation. The components that are key to the successful collaboration is the broad participation at the local level, braiding of funding, a birth to five initiative, strong leadership and starting as a grant program but allowing agencies to blend funding.

Dr. Grafwallner concluded the presentation by explaining that the program is continually improving. The state evaluates progress by looking at kindergarten assessment data and the Early Childhood Accountability System. Management for Results has shown that children are entering school ready to learn at greater rates than before the collaboration took place and more child care settings are accredited.

Discussion followed the presentation. Among the comments and questions posed by participants were the following:

- Maryland's approach demonstrates strategic thinking and actions; should we be thinking more broadly than collaboration?
- Is this a story about the success of collaboration or the power of governance? Governance is key but collaboration can happen without unified governance or models. This may be a research question that needs to be studied.
- Different professional cultures were forced together under the single governance structure. Maybe this helped bridge professional cultures. "Missioning" may help lessen cultural differences.
- What are the variables that produced this headway (county system, limited number of counties?) and was collaboration the grease that made this happen?
- Shared missions of different agencies may have a cost since the mission has a dual focus. Need to be thinking broadly about what we might be losing in collaboration. For instance, in creating a child-focused agency, we separate children's services from work supports, Medicaid, etc. How do we mesh the larger set of goals?
- What is the connection that local collaborations have to state efforts? A state agency can address issues through legislation or regulation. Need to have a state agency that is in tune to local issues. Sometimes there are barriers that are established by the local partners that the state cannot resolve. In Maryland, the local early childhood collaborations are taking what is learned in their local jurisdictions and bringing it back to the state. Strongest collaboration is where all community administrator levels are involved in the collaboration, including city government.
- Since the CCDF is fairly flexible, collaboration involving CCDF was easy in terms of addressing the needs of the state. There were issues with Head Start because the population served and eligibility is different than the other programs.
- The role of private foundations was discussed. Foundations bring something important to the table. Worked with the Maryland Business Roundtable. The Ready at 5 Initiative brought experts to the table. These organizations provide leadership and impetus for change.
- When starting a collaboration like this, it is better to start with a surplus, and in difficult times, the collaboration can help protect programs from cuts. They can help find a way to retain services and make them more efficient. It doesn't make sense to push for more funds when the state is in a deficit situation.

State-Level Collaborations and the Individual Collaborating Programs

Amy Madigan, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services

Amy Madigan explained that this session will focus on the relationship between systems level collaborations and individual programs. The questions that were discussed in this session were: What are the key dimensions of collaboration to measure when examining links with the individual programs? What are the relevant outcomes to consider? What methodological approaches are possible?

Beth Rous, University of Kentucky

Beth Rous began her presentation by explaining that as a researcher, she has taken the approach of looking at policy analysis and evidence across policy issues. Where is the agency located? She also looks at the service delivery model, intervention versus a prevention approach. What are the attitudes and values of a policy maker and do they have the ability to develop a shared vision? Finally, is the policy clear and relevant to the interagency climate?

Dr. Rous explained that her general research approach looks for the explicit and implicit evidence of similarities in organizations such as philosophy, goals, communication and working relationships. She also looks at the scope of agencies and their service options, as well as the levels and types of barriers and facilitators to interagency collaboration. She then discussed the issues with measuring infrastructure. What is the policy and organization of infrastructure? What is the nature of the relationships among agencies? State laws create most collaborations, but mandated groups are under-utilized. She has found that the outside facilitator can help collaboration. Interagency relationships need formalized structures within which they can develop; and the name of the group is important.

Based on her on-the-ground experience, Dr. Rous discussed the importance of certain gears and levers. For example, leadership changes in major agencies change collaboration. Researchers need to look at multiple levels of collaboration and focus on practice. One needs to look at culture of leadership. What happens when leaders change? What happens when you have policy and regulatory changes? Relationships are easy to destroy (policy change, leader change); this is where the outside facilitator comes to bear.

Rebecca Wells, University of North Carolina

Rebecca Wells began her talk by discussing her conceptual approaches, which include stakeholder management, social capital, and team effectiveness. Her research has included case-studies combining network data analysis with qualitative and quantitative analysis of interviews, surveys and archival data. She believes that appropriately designed case studies can demonstrate causal changes based on collaboration. Through her research, she addresses who needs to work together for collaborative efforts to be successful and how they need to engage in order to change outcomes.

Dr. Wells then demonstrated how network analyses can be used to study collaborative process. Using graphical representation, one can visualize who is involved in the collaborative process. Although network research generally relies on interviewing all network members (which is time consuming), it is possible to examine networks using more accessible data, such as meeting attendance. After overall collaboration participation, she showed a hypothetical work group as an example of sub-groups; these too may be traced through mechanisms as simple as attendance records. Then she noted the potential importance of collaborative member ties with key stakeholders not directly represented within meetings, such as the Division of Medical Assistance. These are harder to measure but affect how much a collaborative can accomplish (one possible measure is who is on the collaborative's listserv). Finally, she noted that collaborative impact on each agency's policies and practices depends largely on how well connected individuals participating in the collaborative are within their own agencies. . Although she emphasized

graphical representation in the presentation, network analyses can also compare measures of collaboration such as how centralized information exchange is and how many ties exist (e.g., network "density").

Dr. Wells closed with North Carolina State Collaborative for Children, Youth, and Families examples of changes to policies, procedures, and practices. Collaboration offers potential social capital applicable to supporting child centered agency policies, practices and procedures. Social network analyses can complement other research methods to show capacity as well change over time.

Diane Schilder, Education Development Center, Inc.

Diane Schilder began her presentation by defining the key dimensions in collaboration to measure. To study collaboration one must first develop operational definitions. To do so, it is important to look at the goals of the collaborating programs and the associated short- and long-term outcomes. The desired outcomes of the collaboration and process measures are defined in large part based on the programs that are collaborating. For example, desired outcomes of a child care/Head Start partnership might be to improve school readiness outcomes *and* to improve parents' workforce participation outcomes. By contrast, the desired outcome of a child care, health care, and mental health collaboration might be to improve access to health and mental health care services to children attending child care programs.

In framing research on collaboration, it is also important to consider the target population of each partnering program involved in collaboration. A collaboration among universal pre-Kindergarten (UPK), Head Start, and child care could potentially focus on different target populations since UPK programs can be available to all children, Head Start targets children living below 100 percent of poverty, and child care subsidies target low-income children but definitions of low-income differ by state. Therefore it is important for studies to include background demographic and socio-economic variables that will allow the researchers to carefully examine differences in reaching different target populations. In this way, researchers can provide answers to questions about why UPK/Head Start/Child Care collaborations in one community might be associated with improvements in low-income children's outcomes but might not be associated with such outcomes in a different community.

It is also important that research on collaboration include variables other potential target groups such as students with disabilities or English Language Learners (ELL). Dr. Schilder's research has found that child care/Head Start partnerships are more likely to serve special education students and ELL students than child care/UPK partnerships. She noted that by including background variables about the populations served in her studies, her research team has been able to analyze differences in target populations served based on types of collaboration.

Research must also take into account different state contexts as well as the nature and type of collaboration that states support. Dr. Schilder noted that in her recent study of UPK, Ohio has promoted collaborations between UPK and child care providers by contracting with child care programs that are engaged in collaboration with other early education agencies. By contrast, New York State provides grants to school districts and allows districts to sub-contract with child care

providers. Without taking the state context into account, researchers might fail to focus on the proper geographic catchment area (for example, by focusing on county rather than county and school district,) and might ask the wrong questions (for example, researchers might ask New York child care providers if they have a contract with the state or county rather than asking if the providers have a contract with the district).

Dr. Schilder then discussed measures of collaboration. In order to assess collaboration, researchers must use examine specific collaborative processes. Researchers should start with qualitative methods. Where were the programs similar and different? After this exploratory research, surveys should be developed that reflect key constructs based on the qualitative responses. Then researchers can determine the relationship between process and desired outcomes.

Dr. Schilder concluded with next steps, which included looking at what is happening across states. She suggests that it would be helpful to have national consensus on some outcome measures in early childhood so that people can collect comparable measures. In order for collaborations to work, all stakeholders must agree to basic terms (what does low-income mean?). Researchers must also consider what child outcomes are most appropriate to examine and consider including socio-emotional measures, language and literacy measures, as well as collaboration measures. Finally, more needs to be known about how states are supporting cross-program assessment systems. To what degree do states have separate standards and data systems for child care and pre-Kindergarten? To what degree are states aligning pre-kindergarten, early learning, child care licensing, QRIS, and Head Start standards? How does alignment of state assessment systems (or lack of) affect providers? More research is needed to look at operational definitions of programs and look at outcomes at the federal level.

Discussion followed the presentations. Among the comments and questions posed by participants were the following:

- Problems associated with local providers who may not have the skill set to write grants for participation in collaborations. This was evident in North Carolina where Smart Start has seen an increase in child care, but a decrease in kin and kith care.
- Need to consider unanticipated consequences for providers. In New Jersey's Abbott sites, when they changed the demand side through expansion of pre-kindergarten programs, subsidy barriers kept families out of the system. Casting the net widely and investigating all possible reasons for success or failure of collaboration is important to understand what is going on at the provider level.
- There are sometimes assumptions about providers that may be incorrect. For instance, when talking about pre-kindergarten/child care partnerships, does the pre-k program have two shifts of preschool services? When looking at teachers, we need to talk about how many shifts, how many part time and full time staff. When collaboration is not working well, parents may be able to report challenges.
- Network analysis can show how relationships start, build and change over time. Legislatures may be able to understand this representation of collaboration.
- It is as helpful to look at successful collaboratives as the unsuccessful ones. Unsuccessful collaborations may have gotten caught in a stage. Stages of collaboration are very important to consider. However, it may be hard to recruit a failed collaboration for study.

- Hidden agendas were discussed. Facilitators may be able to help with this. However, identifying hidden agendas may not be as important as being clear about the outcomes and outputs we want to achieve. If collaboration works, that is the most important thing.
- Relationships between people are very important in collaboration, good and bad.

State-Level Collaborations and Children and Families

Jennifer Brooks, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation

This session looked at outcomes for children and families in state/local level collaborations. The questions that were discussed during this session included: What do we know about studying collaboration and its effect on the services received by children and families? What are the issues to consider regarding the study of collaboration and its effect on outcomes for children and families? What approaches are possible? What outcomes can reasonably be expected at different stages of collaboration?

Donna Bryant, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill

Donna Bryant began her presentation by suggesting that we are looking at collaboration backwards. We should start with children and families. We should start with exemplary programs or typical programs to examine what works. Most collaborations are not a single, easily defined intervention, with a single population that is easily evaluated. The attribution of causality is the biggest evaluation challenge. In her work with North Carolina's Smart Start Initiative, Dr. Bryant explained that the initiative did not begin with an explicitly stated theory of change, but the researchers could infer one based on the variety of services that partnerships funded. During the first year, researchers observed and documented what communities did. There were over 100 different programs, and four major categories into which services could be grouped: quality child care, family programs, health programs, and planning and collaboration support. Researchers worked with partnership leaders to establish clarity on the short- and long-term changes that would be expected from the programs; these outcomes then became the focus of the evaluation.

In examining the stages of evaluating collaboratives for children, descriptions of the programs are very important. Normative national samples can be good comparisons. Researchers must observe what services children are getting, and track cohort changes over time. Using this information, Dr. Bryant was able to study specific components in depth. Over time, her team was able to build the case for plausible causal connections. For example, over the first decade of Smart Start, the proportion of quality centers increased. The more that centers participated in Smart Start, the higher quality of care became. Additionally, quality mattered for children; two studies linked children's school readiness to their preschool center's quality. After three to five years of Smart Start, it became more reasonable (and easier) to look at targeted outcomes in children and families. However, researchers must keep expectations realistic and let stakeholders know that one study won't answer all their questions. Future work needs to focus on developing better data systems, obtaining better data on "treatment as usual," and collecting more data on costs and accountability measures.

Abe Wandersman, University of South Carolina

Abe Wandersman began his presentation by explaining the importance of structure and process of collaboration in demonstrating accountability. He has worked with the *Kentucky KidsNow Initiative* which consisted of councils that wrote grants and met regularly. They were more successful in achieving outcomes than individual agencies, and some councils were better than others. It is important to remember that collaboration is a means, and not an end. The framework that Dr. Wandersman uses is FORECAST (Formative Evaluation, Consultation and Systems Technique) (Goodmand & Wandersman). This framework discusses the lifecycle of collaboration and uses both evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence.

The lifecycle of collaboration usually starts with a lead agency getting entities involved in collaboration. Community mobilization is first, followed by needs and resource assessment. Collaborations then consolidate information into a community plan (taking about 18 months) and then the plan is implemented. The FORECAST framework was established in order to figure out what coalitions were trying to do. It was developed as an evaluation plan and available literature was used in creating the framework. This plan is useful in trying to establish benchmarks for collaboration so researchers do not have to invent the wheel every time an evaluation is needed.

Dr. Wandersman then discussed how an open systems framework can help us understand the role of resources, organizational structure and processes, activities and accomplishments in promoting sustainability of collaboration and probability of outcomes over time. In looking at an open systems framework as a logic model, it becomes easy to understand the outcomes of collaboration. Inputs to collaboration might be the internal and external resources of that collaboration. The activities are the action strategy activities and the maintenance activities. Finally, the Output would be the accomplishments of the collaboration. In order to assess this, Dr. Wandersman developed a ten step approach to accountability GTO (Getting to Outcomes). The steps include evidence-based practices, fitting into the community context and the capacity of the collaboration. Understanding the lifecycle of collaboration, as well as approaches to accountability, are central in making sure collaborations are effective.

Rob Fischer, Case Western Reserve University

Rob Fischer's presentation focused on his work in changing the nature of collaboration in early childhood services in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. Collaboration had a major role in framing child indicators, in mobilizing and monitoring programs, and in developing programmatic refinements. Dr. Fischer explained that his research used child indicator data to monitor collaboration (thus making the connection between collaboration and child outcomes). During the first few years of his study, he spent a considerable amount of time developing data management and tracking indicators.

Specifically, Dr. Fischer's work showed that over five years, the focus on school readiness became central. Family self-sufficiency grew, although children were still in poverty at the same rate as before the collaboration. Additionally, although the percentage of children who were the subject of substantiated child abuse cases decreased, the percentage of children who were reported to be maltreated increased. This shows why it is important to have multiple indicators, since data might be misleading.

Rob Fischer then discussed the issues in measuring a system. In his research, newborn home visiting increased after collaboration, which served as a gateway for families to receive other services. Children improved on other well-being indicators because of these services. Based on these results, the state formed a number of new initiatives. In this work, collaboration was related to child and family outcomes. Dr. Fischer concluded by saying that part of the success of the study was that the collaboration lasted as long as it did. Just the maintenance of collaboration over time is a success. He suggested that formulation of a seamless system faces challenges, and programmatic targeting and funding influence commitment. He ended by saying that more data are needed.

Discussion followed the presentations. Among the comments and questions posed by participants were the following:

- The role of economic changes and the economy in this process. In implementing services, may have to be creative with budgets to make sure that funding is consistent. For instance, within the collaborative, Head Start provided funds to the county to continue the home visiting program.
- Plans (missions) need to be decided upon before evaluations are implemented.
- There may be a problem getting access to comparable data. For example, it may be hard to get comparison data from another county when the intent is to show that our county is doing better. Philadelphia's child data system was discussed. This system helps child and family agencies work together to collaborate. Agencies integrate data on individual child level across agencies. This allows researchers to deal with economic issues (benefit/cost). Using this system, researchers can look at data longitudinally (birth through 3rd grade) and were able to, for example, see that 95% of homeless kids in third grade first experienced homelessness before they were six years old. Then they could show how homelessness was related to child neglect and foster care. Based on this information, agencies were able to make appropriate changes. In order for this to happen, good leadership and philanthropy is necessary. Other cities and states, in cooperation with researchers, are doing this as well (New York City, Los Angeles, Chapin Hall, Washington State, and South Carolina). When policy makers see a co-occurrence of children being identified, and can look at costs of any one child, it can make a difference in policies and service delivery as it becomes apparent how much money is wasted on blind service provision. Must become economists if we want to become good collaborators.
- The importance of putting boundaries on the collaboration outcomes. Where and when are they successful? Is it in aligning standards? Teacher preparation? Can these successes be back-mapped to the collaboration process?
- QRIS is a great example of zero to five collaboration. Good ones involve community colleges, family, friend and neighbor care, and home visiting programs. These would be good places to study collaborations targeted toward the same goals but getting there at different ways.
- It appears that the field of early childhood has expanded so that everything we do involves collaboration, e.g., alignment of projects, assessment, accountability, QRIS. Collaboration by definition characterizes every process of change we are engaged in. It is enriched by the fact we can look at it in a variety of ways. We are interested in what the collaboration entities do. What did they bring to the table that would not have been there? What is it about being part of a new thing that creates change? What is the value added to collaboration?

- There might not be a differentiation between funding and collaboration. They are connected. Collaboration could not happen without funding. Preliminary research has shown that in absence of resources, participants are not going to meetings, going to trainings, etc.
- Need to look at contextual data. It is important to think about what kind of contextual supports are available. Those are some of the un-measurable variables that need to be examined.
- Some of the measures would be different for community level collaboration versus state level collaborations.

Revisiting Issues and Identifying Gaps

The second day of the meeting was opened with a brief re-cap of what was discussed during the first day. The first day served to set the stage for the work that would be done the following day, which was to set a research agenda for studying state-level collaborations in early childhood care and education. Participants were asked to work together to discuss the research agenda and propose next steps for researchers in order to move forward with this work.

Participants agreed that there are different models that capture collaboration but so far they have not been able to agree on a common definition for describing what researchers and practitioners mean by collaboration in early childhood. Using the logic model approach (resources, activities), the participants attempted to develop a common definition for the field when researching collaboration, which might then help researchers and practitioners agree on what needs to be studied. The participants decided to discuss what the resources and evaluation of those resources and activities are as a first step in developing a logic model and research definition. The participants also decided that the logic model should be general, since every program would have different activities (local, state, federal). The activities in each program may vary, but the model would highlight developing good relationships and trust within a collaboration. This model would also leave room for individualization for different programs, but the outcomes of a particular activity would be specific to the collaborative effort.

The group also discussed the possible differences in the types of collaboration and their outcomes for children and families. A voluntary collaboration may have different goals and outcomes than a mandated collaboration. Research needs to account for these differences. In discussing outcomes, other participants brought up the importance of the relationship between state and local organizations in carrying out what was done in the collaborative effort. Research must be able to account for the decisions at the state-level and how they are implemented at the local and practice level.

The discussion then moved to the limitations of collaboration. The participants discussed the role of executive leadership and how policy change might limit or expand the role that collaborations have. Participants then asked how collaborations differed from strategic planning. They agreed that researchers and policymakers must be sure to delineate between what makes a collaboration unique and how this process has an impact on family and child outcomes.

Discussion around Inclusion of Child Outcomes when Researching Collaboration:

The participants then began the discussion surrounding child outcomes by stating that although it is difficult to make the connection from a state-level collaboration to outcomes for children and families, this endpoint is important. The purpose of collaborations in early childhood is to have an impact on children and families, therefore child and family outcomes should always be the goal. Although it is difficult and takes time to connect collaborations to child outcomes, they should be included in this research. However, other participants discussed the problems connecting child outcomes may be because the reasons for success might not have anything to do with the collaboration itself. There are so many variables that may influence children's development. Therefore researchers must be careful when they are trying to make this connection.

The participants agreed that there are two ways of looking at child outcomes: What does a community need to do to support child outcomes and what does the federal government need to fund to support these outcomes. The group also discussed including other types of outcomes in addition to child and family outcomes, such as policy outcomes. First, however, an agreement on what we mean by collaboration is essential. What do we mean by state collaboratives?

This discussion ended by the group agreeing that in order to look at child outcomes work needs to be done on connecting the pieces of the puzzle. A member suggested mapping things out. So taking this research from part 'a' and eventually getting to outcomes 'c', even if there are many activities and inputs 'b' between these two parts, this would be a start. Once these parts are mapped out, it will be easier to have the discussion on what is wanted from research and what is needed from the collaboration. This will help the development of the framework for the research agenda. The discussion then moved to defining 'a' 'b' and 'c'.

The "A B C discussion":

A preliminary model was suggested by one of the group members as how to start thinking about the 'a b c' question (i.e., the theory of change). The preliminary model is presented below, but note that the group did not come to a consensus regarding this model:

A: inputs to make a collaboration work (state or local)	**A': process variables**	**B: outcomes of the collaboration**	**C: outcomes for children, families, providers and communities**
Nature of accountabilities	Trust	Efficiencies	
Authorities	Fidelity	Equity	
Leadership	Fairness	Quality of services	
Auspices (mandatory/voluntary)			
Corpus of funding			

The group agreed to break into four smaller groups—and to build on this model or create new directions.

After returning to full group discussion, the group agreed on the importance of context (perceived need for collaboration), processes (pre-existing history), clarity of purpose, membership and resources for collaboration. The group agreed on reciprocal relationships as well. The groups also agreed that this determines whether this is a collaboration. There is an assumption that the whole is the greater than the sum of its parts. Is energy lost when we create the whole? The whole may gain energy from each of the groups. There is a difference between win-win or zero sum and presumably this is measurable.

The group also agreed that for a logic model of collaboration in early childhood, the inputs of the model would include the above mentioned variables (clarity of purpose, membership, time allocated, and context). Process outcomes would include what agencies bring, how people perceive fairness, commitment, shared vision, equity, efficiency, ability to build on work. Activities include an action plan, dissemination, and a data management system. Implementation would include what is the relationship between policies and how these policies impact the implementation of those services. Outcomes of the collaborative process would include the quality of service system and equity in the collaboration.

The group then discussed some unanswered questions that were not addressed in the logic model discussion:

- What makes collaboration unique? The theory is that if we want significant change, we need to bring in people. What is added in collaboration?
- Although there are many activities or processes that occur within organizations, what is unique in collaboration? There is dual allegiance: allegiance to one's own entity and to a new collaboration.
- Lifecycle of collaboration—the lifecycle of collaboration was not addressed. There might be different outcomes for different collaboratives at different times.
- Collaborations have the opportunity to change over time. We must make sure when evaluating collaborative process versus collaborative entity to take into account that different outcomes may be appropriate.
- What is the appropriate dose for collaboration?
- What is the impact of readiness to change? In order to be successful, people need to be ready to do this. If the person who collaborates does not bring back the collaborative ideas to agency, then it goes nowhere.

Discussion on Next Steps and Products

The group work and the rich discussion that occurred when the group came together helped create a logic model for collaboration. It might be useful to share this logic model with other groups, such as state technical assistance programs. They can critique the model and this feedback will make the framework more useful for researchers and evaluators. Collaboration is important for more than just research, it is important for understanding process, facilitation, and time for evaluation.

The group agreed that this model could be taken and made context specific (measures). Additionally, the group agreed that it would be helpful to include experiences of other researchers and practitioners commenting on their experiences and lessons learned from collaboration. What are

the key elements that worked (key leader, etc)? The group was reminded that the Research Connections Key Topic Resource List includes references with some good case studies on collaboration. But, we want to move past the case-studies and figure out how to measure effectiveness and what we mean by effective collaboration.

Other participants suggested having a common forum for questions about collaboration. State examples would be useful to both policy makers and practitioners. It was also suggested that the difference between collaboration, network, and coalition be delineated further. Policy change is a big issue that should be examined. Participants also discussed "translating" the work that has been done in other disciplines to early childhood. Additionally it would be useful for those in the field to create technical assistance materials (including a list of measures), tool kits, a list of mediating variables and outcomes, and a bibliography or literature review on current research. This would also help to overlay the research (and what is known) onto the logic model.

The participants agreed that everyone has a connection to collaborative efforts in different ways. There are many collaborative efforts underway; the group would like to know what else is going on so they can contact other researchers to get advice. A member suggested looking at major foundations. For example, the McArthur Foundation was asked to set up integrated data networks. Miami and Boston are forming a collaborative; Vermont is forming a collaborative; there are activities in states and municipalities and the federal government might partner with these foundations to understand collaboratives better. The group agreed that within one's own context, often times one does not see what is going on in other states and communities. A group member asked whether we can borrow ideas from other fields that have shown greater progress (e.g., environmental), but it was suggested that the difference and complexity of this work is the child outcome piece, since it is very difficult to demonstrate that collaboration at the state-level had impacts and effects on children and families. How can differences at the child and family level be traced specifically to the collaboration itself? This makes collaboration in early childhood difficult.

Finally several themes that were not covered previously were raised toward the end of the session. A group member discussed that although we have focused on the unit as the collaborative; we have not considered the role of collaborative burden on a single entity. If agencies are involved in several collaboratives during the same time, how can they give attention to one? This should be considered in research. Additionally, during the lifetime of collaboration, some people aren't fully engaged continually and this needs to be taken into account. Researchers must also look at the issue of accountability. Accountability doesn't need to be only about blame. We need to demystify accountability.

The group then discussed some final points about the work of collaboration in early childhood:

- The importance of obtaining good results and making all of these systems work together effectively was stressed.
- Good partnerships between leaders are central.
- We need to make sure collaboratives benefit from what we know about practice.
- Practice needs to be changed. If the practice is not changed, outcomes will not be changed. It starts at the state level.

- OPRE will be sponsoring a meeting on implementation this September. Collaboration may be in the implementation piece. These meetings need to be connected to ensure collaboration and implementation are connected.

All materials produced as follow-up to the meeting will be publicly available at Child Care and Early Education Research Connections (www.researchconnections.org).