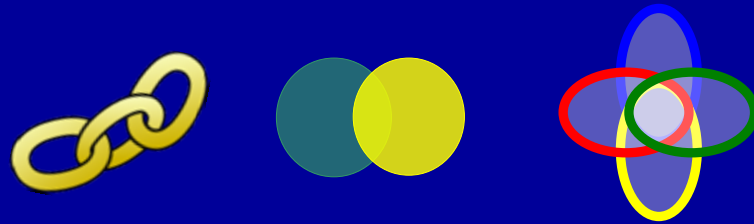


# *Setting the Context: The Process of Collaboration*



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

*May 24-25, 2010*

*Washington, DC*

*Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed.D.  
Teachers College, Columbia University*

# *Presentation Overview*

- *Looking Back, Quickly*
- *What We Must Know, Not-So-Quickly*
  - Boundaries for the Monster
  - What's Magic
  - Getting Real
  - Discerning the Endgame
  - On the Mark

*Part I:*  
*Looking Back, Quickly*

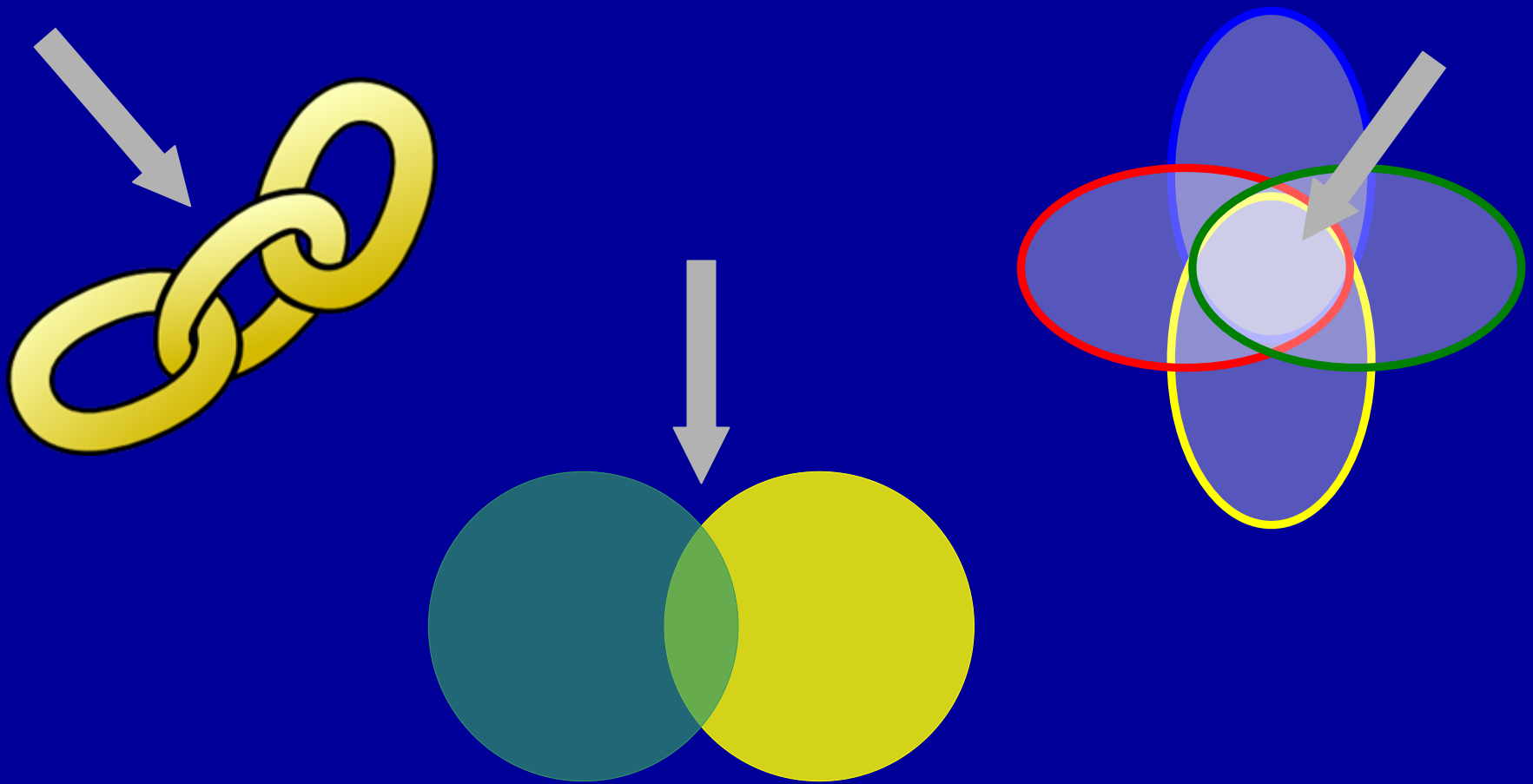
# *Looking Back: Defining It*

- Collaboration comes from the Latin words, *com* and *labora*, meaning “coming together in labor” (Hemmelman, 1996)
- Relationship where two or more entities come together to work on a joint effort (Huxman, 1996; Jordan & Michel, 2000; Kerka, 1997)
- Relationship where “appreciations and/or resources” are pooled to achieve what one could not achieve alone (Gray, 1989)

# *Looking Back: Applying It*

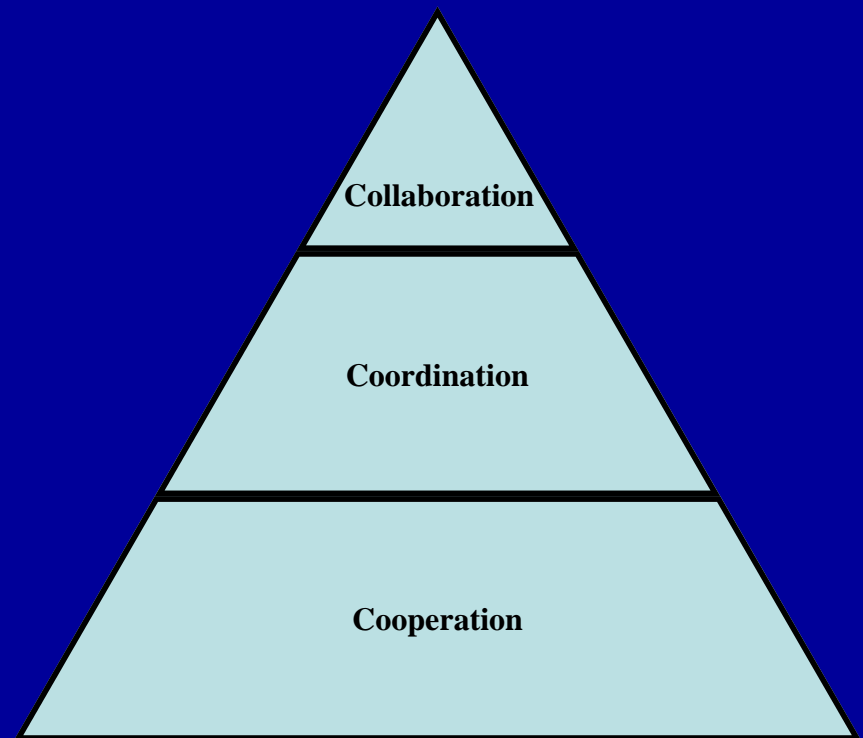
- As such, collaboration is a slippery construct, applied, in our field, to diverse entities:
  - Across systems: Health, Mental Health, Nutrition; Family Support; Early Learning; Special Needs
  - Across programs that provide core early learning services (e.g., child care, pre-kindergarten, Head Start)
  - Across diverse ministries or departments that oversee the programs (DOEs, DHHS)
  - Across or within a single state or field that is set up to coordinate services (e.g., councils, partnerships, alliances, networks; Bailey and Koney, 2000)
  - Across classrooms: as in two teachers sharing materials or groups of children

# *Looking Back: Imaging It*



# *Looking Back: Distinguishing It*

- Conceptualized collaboration as the third and most critical tier of a set of accepted interaction
- Was a time of polite, but skeptical cooperation
- ACYS prohibited braiding (co-mingling) of funds



# *Looking Back: Theorizing About It*

- **Lawson (2004):**
  - Collaborations among professionals
  - Collaborations among professionals and citizens
  - Collaborations among organizational and government systems
- **Leidtika (1996):**
  - Metacapability tool
  - Builds and transfers capacity
- **Hardy, Lawrence, & Phillips (2002):**
  - Creates protoinstitutions
  - New entities with own rules, practices, and technologies

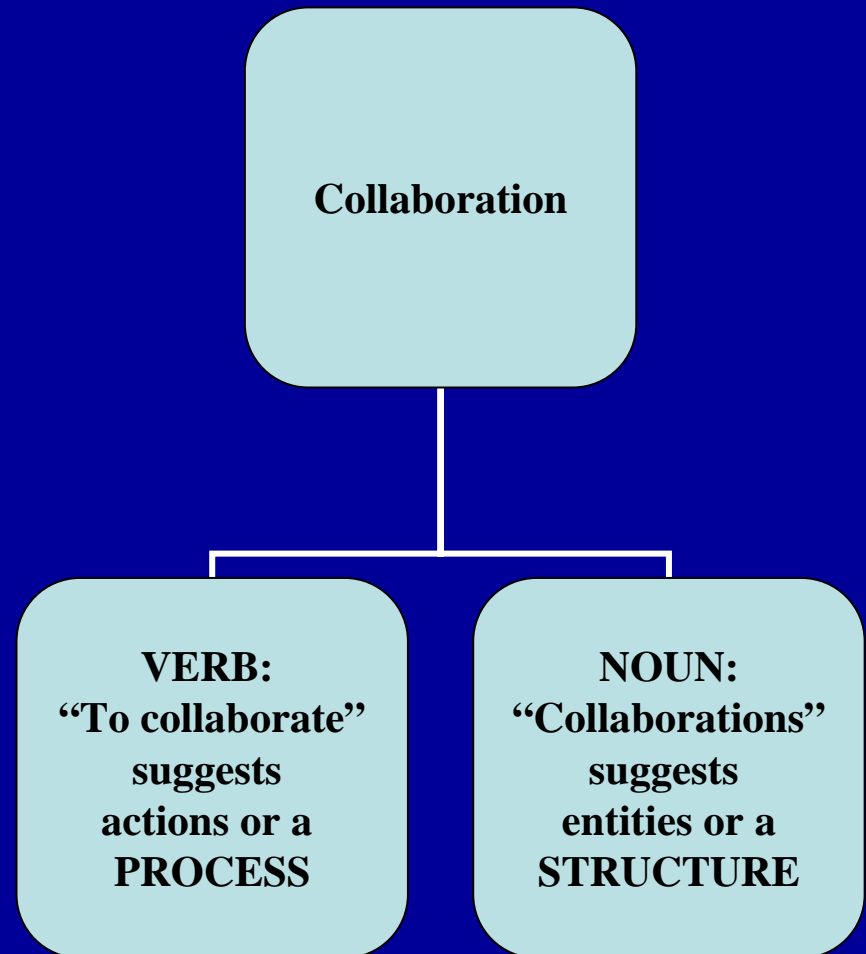


# *Looking Back: Terming It*

- In quest for clarity, have tried to borrow constructs that concretize it:
  - Language of *business and industry*: merger and acquisition
  - Language of the *bureaucrats*: services/systems integration
  - Language of the *optimists*: partnerships
  - Language of the *oppressed*: power-broking

# *Looking Back: Understanding It*

- **VERB:** To collaborate
  - Suggests that it includes the work that people do, the process they undertake, the relationships they do and don't establish
- **NOUN:** Collaboration
  - Suggests that these processes are usually fortified by some structure (e.g., council, organization, alliance)



*Part II:*  
*What We Must Know,*  
*Not-So-Quickly*

# *What We MUST Know 1*

**PREMISE:** You can't research or assess what you can't define

- Need some conceptual work on what precisely we are measuring
- If we use “collaboration” to describe a process, then it could apply to lots of different kinds of collaborations that are different (councils, advisory committees, governance entities, partnerships)
- What distinguishes these and does it matter?
- Is there a transcendent unit of analysis?

**WWMK 1:** “The Monster needs some boundaries!”

**RESEARCH QUESTION 1:** What IS collaboration and what distinguishes it from other forms of partnerships?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 1A:** Can you study a process, independent of the structures that frame it?

# *What We MUST Know 2*

**PREMISE:** Some things make some “collaborations” more successful than others, and this magical “I gotta-get-me-some” elixir is worth knowing

- Despite the reality that collaborations exist for diverse purposes in diverse contexts, we continue to think that there are potent and common processes that can be known and shared
- Need honesty about what we really can adapt across contexts/purposes
- Need to understand if researching and knowing will have any potential downsides. Greater expectations from admittedly fragile entities?

**WWMK 2:** “What’s the magic, for whom and under what conditions?”

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2:** What are the process characteristics that make collaborations effective?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2A:** How replicable are they?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2B:** Must they exist over time or are certain characteristics more potent at one time (e.g., start-up) than at other time/s?

# *What We MUST Know 3*

**PREMISE:** We can empirically research what makes a difference

- Is what we want and need to know about process really knowable and measurable?
- Milbrey McLaughlin argues that you can't measure what really matters (e.g., love, happiness)

**WWMK 3:** “Let's get real!!”

**RESEARCH QUESTION 3:** Do we have the research tools and methodologies to measure collaborations' important process variables, like trust and understanding?

# *What We MUST Know 4*

**PREMISE:** The process of adult and organizational collaboration impacts children's outcomes

- Do we really believe that a diffuse, often irregular process like collaboration can make a difference in child outcomes?
- Would collaborations be worthwhile if they only demonstrated process outcomes?
- What are the range of collaborative outcomes that we should consider (e.g., cost efficiencies, redundancy elimination)?

**WWMK 4:** “What’s the real (and appropriate) endgame?”

**RESEARCH QUESTION 4:** What is and should be the desired outcome of collaborative efforts?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 4A:** To, and for what, should collaborations be held accountable?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 4B:** What is the criteria for effectiveness?

# *What We MUST Know 5*

**PREMISE:** Collaborations are generally loosely configured, and are highly context and person dependent. As such, their life potency is highly varied

- Is it a passé construct? In an era of mandated accountability, performance measurement, does collaboration's mettle still hold?
- In 2010 and beyond, is collaboration still the right metric?
- Is it potent enough to get early childhood where it needs and wants to go?

**WWMK 5:** “Are we on the mark?”

**RESEARCH QUESTION 5:** What other processes or structures should be considered to evoke consistent, positive child outcomes on the indicators early education traditionally values?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 5A:** Will there ever be a time or a set of conditions when collaboration will be less necessary?



# ***COLLABORATION 2010 AND BEYOND***

- Not simple, my questions are:
  - What is the collaboration that we are investigating?
  - Is it worth knowing?
  - Is it technically knowable?
  - What do we honestly expect from it?
  - Is it still the right construct in 2010?