Defining and Measuring Effective State-Level Collaborations in Early Care and Education: Organizational Perspective

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

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Effective Collaboration

- Using Gray's (1989) definition of collaboration as a process, highlights several key issues:
  - Exploration of a problem
  - Deeper and shared definition of a problem
  - Search for solutions aligned with the shared definition
- This examination focuses on the perspective of organizations involved in the collaboration process to understand effectiveness
  - What do organizational participants want to derive from the collaborative process?
  - What design features may contribute to effective collaborating?
  - How can organizational participants directly contribute to the effectiveness of the collaborative process?

Participation in a Collaborative Process

- Oliver (1990)-five factors:
  - Efficiency, Stability, Legitimacy, Reciprocity, Asymmetry
- Sowa (2009)-dual motivation: broader organizational benefit and benefit associated with the set of services provided by the organization
- Collaborating is effective when organizations are able to connect to the process and identify what benefits may result from their participation

Selected Variables—Participation in a State Level Collaboration

- Policy learning
- Shared problem definition
- Organizational legitimacy
- Access to new resources (money, knowledge, people)
- Increased connectivity—development of closer ties between actors in the policy field

Designing Effective Collaborative Processes

- Who are the key stakeholders to be involved in the process and how are their roles defined?
- How clear are the rules and norms structuring the collaborative process?
- What is the goal of the process? Is there a clear end state? If not, are there procedures for periodically revisiting the purpose of the collaborative?

Selected Variables—Collaborative Design

- Stakeholder analysis
- Goal clarity
- Goal alignment
- Rules on participation
  - Analyze governing documents
    - Structure of the collaborative process
  - Decision making
    - How are decisions made?
    - Perceptual measures of the decision-making process
- Collaborative learning mechanisms
  - How is performance measured?
  - Design features to revisit the purpose of the collaborative (funding stages, MOU deadlines)

Participants and Effective Collaboration

- Effective collaboration requires investment on the part of the participants—care and feeding of collaborations
- Participants should assess the following when they enter collaborations:
  - Understanding of the core issue(s) underlying the collaborative process
  - Organizational culture
  - Collaborative capacity
    - Bench strength for participation

Selected Variables—Participant Capacity for Effective Collaboration

- **Organizational climate**
  - Are the participants in the "right place" organizationally to be engaging in this collaborative venture?
- **Organizational culture**
  - How collaborative is the organizational culture of the participant?
  - Are there facets of the organizational culture that could act as barriers to participation?
- **Collaborative capacity**
  - Clear staff time allotted for the work of the collaboration
  - Staff contribution to the collaborative valued in the organization
  - Management systems to handle paperwork associated with the collaborative venture

The Challenge of Measurement

- Many of the variables identified in the process of collaboration can be both an input and an outcome
- Measuring effective collaboration requires some social construction
- An effective collaboration involves:
  - Participants who understand why they are involved and have strong collaborative capacity
  - Clear rules and norms for structuring interaction
  - Collaborative learning mechanisms designed to assess the continued operation of the collaborative
  - The development of a shared understanding of the problem and the negotiated order of the involved actors