

2010 CCPRC Annual Meeting
Plenary Session 5
October 22, 2010, 9:30 a.m.

Early Childhood Collaborations: Definitions, Measurement, and Next Steps

Description

Building on the May 2010 meeting, Collaborations in Early Care and Education, this plenary session explored the issue of defining and operationalizing collaborations in early childhood education, introduced the beginnings of a logic model to articulate the components of successful collaborations, and highlighted the current status of our knowledge, gaps in our knowledge, and OPRE activities to address these gaps.

Facilitator

Beth Rous, University of Kentucky

Presenters

Kathleen Dwyer, OPRE
Darrin Hicks, University of Denver
Jessica Sowa, University of Colorado, Denver
Tamara Halle, Child Trends

Scribe

Eva Carter, NCCIC

1. Documents in Session Folder

- “Collaboration in Early Care and Education: Establishing a Framework for a Research Agenda Logic Model,” Darrin Hicks, Jessica Sowa, and Barbara Smith
- “Collaborations in Early Care and Education: Establishing a Framework for a Research Agenda,” Kathleen Dwyer
- “Collaborations Annotated Bibliography,” Tamara Halle, Kristen Darling-Churchill, Amy Blasberg, Shana Simkin, and Ali Chrisler

2. Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Kathleen Dwyer
 - The goal of this session is to discuss the process of collaboration. Over the past several years, OPRE has heard that more research is needed to help identify successful partnerships, and identify what makes them successful and effective. How do we know some collaborations are effective? From the perspective of researchers, it is difficult to measure inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. If the effectiveness of collaborating programs reflects more than the sum of the parts, we must be able to measure “value added.” An interagency planning committee was formed to plan a meeting of researchers to explore these issues and construct a framework for evaluation of partnerships at the State level.

- Questions addressed during the workgroup meeting included what is known and what and needs to be known? What are the important measurement and design issues? How can research help identify effective collaboration and what about these collaborations is effective and for whom are the collaborations effective?
 - Sharon Lynn Kagan set the context and posed the following questions to frame what we need to know:
 - What are investigating (what are we trying to define)?
 - Is it worth doing (what is the magic)?
 - Is it technically knowable?
 - What outcomes can we expect?
 - Is it still the appropriate construct in 2010?
 - Defining and Measuring State-Level Collaborations:
 - Collaborative processes can be examined from the individual, team and/or organizational levels.
 - These processes can be activities or outcomes, depending on the goal of the collaboration.
 - Many possible “process” variables...these can be measured.
 - Methods can include interviewing/surveys and network analyses.
 - Linking to Outcomes:
 - Complex process of linkages to the level of children and families
 - You can demonstrate effects piece by piece or analyze data for entire community.
 - Consensus was reached about the need for a theory of change/logic model—we began mapping this at the meeting.
 - Other issues: need to remember contextual factors, leadership, etc. that can affect the effectiveness of collaboration; need to consider lifecycle of collaboration and the relationship between state and local levels.
 - A meeting summary is available on the Research Connection website (www.researchconnections.org).
- **Summary of Presentation #2: Jessica Sowa**
 - Developed a logic model for the process of collaboration—what goes into the process and how it works. Multiple levels of analysis; outcomes at State, community, and family/child levels.
 - The model is a theory of change model, which outlines models and activities in an effort to understand the process.
 - Underlying assumptions:
 - Actors involved at the State level are the policy-level actors
 - When examining how inputs into collaboration are converted into a process; concerned with the quality of the process
 - Context matters. We need to assess the environment in which these collaborations are being implemented. What is the political will?
 - Jessica provided an overview of the logic model (included in the attached PPT). Inputs to collaboration include:
 - Stakeholder inputs: what each stakeholder needs to contribute in order to design a quality process of collaboration.

- Overall design components—having the right number of people at the table. Roles and responsibilities. Decision-making process—change agent, champion.
 - Collaborative outcomes—State level: Could include measures such as: changes to understanding of the policy problem; reduction of fragmentation in the system; improved trust and relationships; increased adaptive capacity; access to new resources; changes in stakeholder organizations; and accomplishment of the explicit goals of the collaborations.
 - Service Level Outcomes: what is the particular community level you want to measure (shared problem definitions, shared goals, and shared outcomes); improved service coordination; improved ability to track outcomes for families and children.
 - Logic model was developed for State-level work, but could be used anywhere. It is a work in progress and needs to be applied to a “real” situation.
- **Summary of Presentation #3: Darren Hicks**
 - Process components include design features that arise in the operation of the collaboration. A process is largely communicative. Features of what we believe characterize a high-quality process include:
 - Norms—Ground rules for keeping the process operating.
 - Inclusion—How stakeholders perceive that the right people are at the table.
 - Authenticity—Stakeholders have the authority to make decisions.
 - Equality—All stakeholders have equal authority, which influences the process.
 - Problem focus—Do stakeholders believe there are real problems.
 - Support—Need political support.
 - Identification—Perception that stakeholders share the same goals outside of their own agencies.
 - Facilitation.
 - Generative purpose—How is the purpose understood?
 - There is no ethical good in collaboration if it does not result in change for families and children.
 - Outcomes are mediated by relationships.
 - We do know what is needed for high-quality process (see above list).
 - We also know what works: study of Nurse-Family Partnership Project in Colorado.
- **Summary of Presentation #4: Tamara Halle, Child Trends**
 - The collaborations meeting in May helped establish a research agenda on collaboration. Follow-up activities include a logic model, annotated bibliography, and a measures compendium.
 - Overview of annotated bibliography: focused on articles published since 2000, but also included some seminal works from the 1980s. Review extended beyond the early childhood education (ECE) field.
 - Identified 70 articles focusing on collaboration; articles had to be prioritized. OPRE ultimately chose 28 articles for inclusion.
 - Primary questions explored in the collaboration literature included: financing and the intersection of funding and resources; comparison of preK, child care, and Head Start partnerships; and evaluation of collaborations including outcomes, barriers and lessons learned.

- Twenty-eight annotations were completed with a variety of methodologies and a primary focus on ECE.
- Key elements of collaboration include: structure, infrastructure, governance, relationships, incentives, challenges and measurement.
- Seven of the 28 articles had definitions/terminology and attempted to provide two basic approaches: description of stakeholder engagement and description of the intensity of collaborative relationships.
- Need to come to consensus about terminology
- General findings about collaboration:
 - Collaboration is both a process and outcome and entails continuous change.
 - Relationships and partnerships leverage resources.
 - Collaboration designs vary according to context, needs, and policy environments.
 - Research must inform collaborative approaches.
 - Incentives to collaborate include: opportunities to expand services through shared resources; inclusive representation of stakeholders' views; inventing new ways to respond to social problems.
- Empirically supported outcomes of collaboration: documented growth in number and complexity of inter-agency relationships and community network ties; increased access to care; and improved program quality.

3. Summary of Discussion with Presenters and Participants

- Bobbie Weber asked about a collaboration that operated for 7 years and then reverted back to a single provider. She asked, “Did we do something wrong? Are they supposed to die? Are they worth it?” Discussion included the importance of reviewing the life cycle of partnerships and institutionalizing the norms of the collaborative process. When a crisis hits, how does the collaborative respond? Do you have to become an institution at some point in the collaborative process? When stakeholders believe everyone is authentic, they recognize changes in the ways people in the community do business. How do you manage exit? We must find ways to manage exits and come to an understanding about resilience. How do processes allow you to manage change?
- Understanding the difference between bonding and social capital...which requires a broker who knows both types of agency. “Brokering and bridging” is an interesting way to view collaborations as a whole (i.e., is your collaboration out in the wilderness or does it fit within an overall system)?
- One participant encouraged researchers to develop a tool to manage authentic collaboration, indicating that there are problems when people are forced to come together.