Partnerships and Collaborations I

Building Connections: An Evaluation of the Partnership Between Early Head Start and Child Welfare Services in a Rural Midwestern Community

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This research is from an evaluation of a partnership between a local Early Head Start (EHS) program and a Child Welfare Services agency. In 2003 the local EHS program and Child Welfare Services (CWS) agency in a rural Midwestern community formed a partnership to better serve children who had come to the attention of CWS through investigation of child abuse or neglect hotline reports. Partnership goals included reducing recidivism of child maltreatment and permanency for the children. To achieve those goals, the EHS home visitor served a reduced caseload and provided training opportunities for CWS. Outcomes for these families included 1) increased parenting knowledge and skills, 2) improved in-home safety, and 3) reduced parental stress.

Success was measured by increased attention to infant/toddler mental health throughout the process of working with the family while involved with CWS through an increase in the workers' knowledge of infant/toddler development and infant-caregiver attachment. These issues were identified for their particular relevance for young children experiencing a disruption in care (Howe, Brandon, Hinings, & Schofield, 1999). EHS facilitated training for CWS to improve the agency's utilization of key concepts of attachment and child development in their work with children and families.

To evaluate this partnership, focus groups were conducted with all stakeholders (e.g., EHS home visitor and supervisor, CWS supervisors and caseworkers, and juvenile court officers). A semi-structured interview protocol was employed, which was modified after each focus group in order to incorporate emerging themes from previous interviews (Mason, 2002). In addition, participant observation was utilized to gather information at meetings with EHS and CWS. Data were coded and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
The evaluation sought to determine the factors contributing to success in the partnership and the challenges to bringing these agencies together. Findings revealed that both agencies were committed to improving the outcomes of infants/toddlers through the partnership. The partnership was strong from the beginning because of past relationships with the two agencies. However, the data revealed an underlying division in the two agencies' perspectives and operating frameworks for working with children and families. The EHS program operates from the strengths-based perspective (Graybeal, 2001), whereas the inertia of an agency long mired in bureaucracy inhibits CWS caseworkers' from taking that perspective. For example, in an effort to address the needs of young children experiencing a move either from their home of origin or while in the custody of CWS from one foster home to another, the EHS and CWS professionals sought to develop an infant/toddler mental health protocol (i.e., a removal checklist with questions such as, "Does your child have a special blanket?"), despite collaboration in developing the protocol, the implementation was hampered by the agency's limited

understanding of child development, high caseloads, and deficit-based perspective of families. Suggestions for improving the partnership included continued communication between EHS and CWS, informal and formal training on young children's well-being, and increased reflection on the divergent, but complementary, purposes of the two organizations in serving families.

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An Investigation of Partnership within the Context of a Federally-Funded Collaboration Initiative

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Nationally, increasing attention is focused upon enhancing collaboration between the multiple agencies that provide services to young, low-income children and their families (Chaudry, 2004). It is generally believed that because the delivery of services to low-income families is often scattered and fragmented, these services are less effective. However, forming productive community partnerships is difficult work. Among the foremost challenges is creating a shared commitment to a common vision and specific goals. Often, the most common difficulties to achieving this center around trust, agency culture, conflict avoidance, fiscal resources, and staff training (Greenfield, 2005). In an effort to address the need to support local collaborations among service agencies, the Administration for Children and Families launched the Early Head Start/Child Welfare Services Initiative. Twenty-six, three-year collaborations were funded nationally in 2003. The present study will share process evaluation findings from one of the funded collaborations between two agencies serving low-income families in a Northeastern city.

Staff members who participated in this evaluation included 4 supervisors, 8 direct service providers, and 3 persons who provided both supervision and direct service (total N=15).
Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative satisfaction ratings were obtained via Likert-type items for joint decision-making, communication between the agencies, conflict resolution, and joint training and supervision. Quantitative findings indicated that, overall, participants were not satisfied across these areas. Scores for all four areas fell below the expected median of 2.5, indicating room for improvement.

Qualitative data were obtained via an open-ended survey questionnaire. Participants' responses to 7 open-ended questions were content analyzed using an open-coding procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Three researchers independently conducted line-by-line readings and re-readings of the full text of all survey transcripts and identified a comprehensive list of emergent themes from the transcripts for each question. Thematic categories were descriptive rather than interpretive (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Qualitative findings provided specific information on individuals' perceptions of the collaboration strengths and challenges. Generally speaking, strengths of the collaboration included: opportunities for professional enrichment, positive effects of the program on the clients, and staff commitment. Common challenges mentioned were paradigmatic or philosophical differences, resistance of staff, misunderstandings, and conflict. Communication emerged as a distinct theme under 4 of the 7 questions, and was mentioned in response to almost every question. Overall, 35 themes emerged from the responses to open-ended survey questions. Cross-question analysis revealed that these themes could be represented by 5 higher order dimensions: Communication, Interpersonal Climate, Structural/Systems Climate, Personal Factors, and Client-Related.

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A Study of a Pioneering Early Childhood Partnership Among Head Start, Special Education, Child Care, and Public Schools

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(Summary not available)

Resilience, Partnership-Directed Approach: A Tool for Conducting Multiculturally Competent Research

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(Summary not available)

Community Collaboration: A 10-Year Journey for Young Children

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There is a growing emphasis on collaboration to help families gain access to affordable, quality care and education. C*ollaboration* has different meanings to different people.

This session charts our pathway of a 10 year toward creating a collaborative partnership that has resulted in building a thriving facility where 700 children and families are served in an inclusive collaborative environment. We answer two key questions that guided us along our journey.
(1) How can we distinguish between *degrees of working together* so potential partners understand significant differences and communicate in a common language?
(2) What *conversations* do partners need to engage to make informed choices among distinct options?
We have limited our focus to three types of relationships.

Coordination: Organizations may find there is value in communicating when and where they provide families with services to increase access and reduce duplication, but may not disclose that they are submitting competing grants or changing fees outside the partnership. They work together on common interests while maintaining their boundaries and distinct interests.

Cooperation: Agencies cooperate to meet a community need by recognizing their respective strengths. One provides particular early education needs. Another provides access to community resources. Another provides food and transportation. They may not share information on their own internal debates about potential future services, but they do work together to accomplish a larger aim while each organization to maintains distinct boundaries.

Collaboration: Agencies find that they have a compelling common purpose best achieved by opening their organizational boundaries. Our Partnership committed to building a facility in which two Head Start organizations, the Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and YWCA provide early education and care in classrooms that included children from diverse cultural, economic and ability levels and provides access to community resources and services.

Implementing our dream may require each agency to make adjustments in how they provide services, develop a common curriculum and create ways to share costs equitably. Policies and practices from each agency were adapted in the new building. They chose to share control and accountability for their future with others over whom they have no direct influence. This collaboration has evolved over the ten year journey as we explored these six "focused" working together elements:

- Shared Goals – must take into consideration which values, mission, policies are nonnegotiable.
- Shared Power – partnerships are formed to achieve shared goals by leveraging the common and distinct resources each partner brings to the table.

- Shared View of Legitimate Interdependence – partners must do a “reality check” and affirm their belief that they are legitimately interdependent with respect to shared goals.
- Mutual Respect and Trust – are rooted in experience. They take a long time to build and a short time to undermine.
- Shared Control – is the link between shared power and mutual respect.
- Shared Accountability – the link between shared goals and trust is shared accountability.