

The Process of Developing Collaborative Partnerships for Providing Early Childhood Services in
Nebraska: A Qualitative Study

Manijeh Badiie and Vicki L. Plano Clark

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Eleanor Kirkland

Head Start-State Collaboration Office at the Nebraska Department of Education

Manuscript Prepared for: *School Community Journal*

Corresponding Author:

Vicki Plano Clark
Office of Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research
114 Teachers College Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0345
Phone: 1-402-472-9108
FAX: 1-402-472-8319
Email: vpc@unlserve.unl.edu

Acknowledgments:

This research was supported by federal funds granted to the Nebraska Head Start-State Collaboration Office from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Head Start [Catalog Federal Domestic Programs 93.600, Grant#97CD0005/09]. The authors would like to express their gratitude to the participants for providing their time and insights to this project. We also thank Heidi Arndt for her extensive

support of the project and our colleagues at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for feedback on early drafts of this manuscript.

Manijeh Badiiee (MA, St. Edwards University) is a doctoral student in counseling psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and works as a research assistant in the Office of Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research. She plans on becoming a professor and aspires to further knowledge on Iranian populations, global women's empowerment and transformative research methods.

Vicki L. Plano Clark is Director of the Office of Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research and a Research Assistant Professor in the Quantitative, Qualitative, and Psychometric Methods program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her writings focus on methodological discussions about the use and adoption of mixed methods research in the areas of education, health research, family research, and counseling psychology. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Vicki Plano Clark, 114 Teachers College Hall, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68588-0345, or vpc@unlserve.unl.edu.

Eleanor Kirkland holds a B.S. in Social Work from Nebraska Wesleyan University and a M.A. from the University of Nebraska in Vocational and Adult Education, emphasis in social and systems change. She currently serves as the Head Start Early Childhood Systems Director for the Nebraska Department of Education, Head Start-State Collaboration Office.

The Process of Developing Collaborative Partnerships for Providing Early Childhood Services in Nebraska: A Qualitative Study

Abstract

Although Head Start is an important community resource for providing early childhood services, little research has been conducted on how Head Start offices collaborate with schools to form partnerships. The purpose of this study was to explore the process of developing formal collaborative agreements from the perspectives of Nebraska Head Start and school personnel. A qualitative grounded theory approach was utilized. First, 102 memoranda of agreement were analyzed to develop a framework for writing formal agreements. Next, eight Head Start personnel and school staff were interviewed. A model for the process of developing collaborative agreements was developed around four stages: initiating pre-partnership procedures, building relationships, developing the agreement, and modifying and maintaining the collaboration. Strategies for each stage of the process are described. The model is intended to help Head Start and school personnel understand and navigate the partnership process.

Key Words:

Head Start, partnerships, collaboration, memorandum of understanding, qualitative research

The Process of Developing Collaborative Partnerships for Providing Early Childhood Services in Nebraska: A Qualitative Study

Since its inception in 1965, Head Start programs have enrolled more than 25 million children (Office of Head Start, 2009). In the fiscal year 2007-08 alone, these programs provided services to 908,412 children nationwide (Office of Head Start, 2009). In 2009, Head Start and Early Head Start programs received over 9 billion dollars in funding (National Head Start Association, 2009a). The importance of Head Start has grown in recent years due to its focus on helping economically disadvantaged children and children with disabilities (Horn, 2005; NHSA, 2009b). Participation in Head Start has been linked to increased rates of graduating from high school and attending college, higher earnings in early twenties, and decreased likelihood of being charged with a crime later in life (Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002).

Most literature on Head Start has focused on child outcomes (e.g., Bracken & Fischel 2007; Iruka, 2009; Sekino & Fantuzzo, 2005) and instructor professional development (e.g., Dickinson, Darrow, & Tinubu, 2008; Domitrovich, Gest, Gill, Jones, & DeRousie, 2009). Significantly less attention has been paid to issues related to establishing Head Start programs in communities and the ways that community partners collaborate to provide Head Start services. The literature on collaboration within Head Start programs primarily consists of resource guides (Haglund & Larson, 1994; Illinois State Department of Human Services, 2001; National Alliance of Business, 1998; Vermont State Department of Education, 2005). Some work has also examined Head Start collaboration related to state programs (Stebbins & Scott, 2007), child support programs (Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2003), and family relationships (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003; Zhang, Bennett, & Bair Heal, 2002). There is a dearth of research, however, about the process of collaboration between Head Start and school district partners.

Head Start programs are formed through collaborative partnerships between Head Start and an organization, usually a school district, to offer early childhood services within local communities. These partnerships have long been required to develop formal agreements for the provision of services for children with disabilities and recently, agreements became required for providing pre-K services through Head Start as well (Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act, 2007). These formal written agreements, known as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs), are documents that outline the relationship and responsibilities of Head Start and school partners for providing early childhood services to pre-K children and children with disabilities. Developing formal agreements can be a time-consuming, overwhelming process and if it does not go well, the program may not sustain itself. Thus, if the Head Start partnership process is not well-developed, the needs of the community, including children, families, and schools, will not be met. As such, the issue of collaboration and the development of formal agreements has become an essential component of Head Start programs.

Despite the importance of forming effective collaborative partnerships, little research explores the development and use of formal collaborative agreements, and even fewer studies address their development in the words of the people who develop and use them. Because Head Start programs are expanding, it is important that stakeholders understand the process of creating formal agreements for providing early childhood programs. A research-based model of this process can serve as a tool for educators, Head Start staff, and anyone else affiliated with Head Start or interested in collaborations. In addition, with an understanding of this process, policy makers may be able to enact policies and supports that better facilitate meaningful collaboration.

The purpose of this study is to explore the process of developing formal collaborative agreements from the perspectives of Head Start personnel and personnel from school partners

within the state of Nebraska. There are three main research questions: What is a formal written collaborative agreement for providing early childhood services? What is the process of developing a formal collaborative agreement? What are the conditions, contexts, strategies, and outcomes that relate to this process?

Methods

The research team. The research team included individuals from different disciplinary backgrounds affiliated with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and the Head Start-State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) at the Nebraska Department of Education. Team members included a methodologist with expertise in mixed methods and qualitative research and a counseling psychology graduate research assistant with prior experience conducting qualitative research. They led the data collection and analysis aspects of the study. In addition, the team included two HSSCO staff members. The HSSCO director provided content expertise, facilitated access to participants, and provided continual feedback on the research process and findings. Regular contact among team members was maintained throughout the study.

The qualitative approach. The research team utilized a qualitative, grounded theory approach to explore the process of developing a collaborative agreement to provide early childhood services in Nebraska. Qualitative research is a type of inquiry in which researchers utilize participants' views to address broad, general questions (Creswell, 2008). A qualitative design is conducive to this study because it provides a more complete, in-depth description. Grounded theory is a specific qualitative approach used to develop an analytical schema of a process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory procedures were used in this study because they are best suited for understanding a process from the points of view of people who are directly engaged in that process (Creswell, 2007).

Consistent with a qualitative grounded theory approach, we gathered data sources that would help us better understand collaborative agreements and the process by which they are developed. The two primary forms of data were agreement documents currently in use by Head Start partnerships and interviews with Head Start directors and school partner personnel.

Examination of collaborative agreement documents. The study began with the analysis of existing formal collaborative agreements in Nebraska. Using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002), all partnerships in the state that met the criterion of having a collaborative agreement to provide early childhood services through Head Start were selected and asked to provide a copy of their agreement documents. The resulting document database included 102 individual partnership agreement documents representing 20 Head Start programs.

The researchers analyzed the documents for their collaborative elements. Using a process of open coding, the two analysts independently coded an initial set of documents to identify the elements found within them (Creswell, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). They discussed the initial codes and, finding great uniformity, combined the analyses into a common code list and shared them with HSSCO director. The director expressed that the coding was congruent to her experiences, so the coding scheme was used as the basis for analyzing the remaining documents. An Excel analysis template based on the coding scheme was refined throughout the analysis, and a summary table was prepared that described the multiple elements found across the documents.

Interviews with Head Start and school partner personnel. The interviews built upon the document analysis results by studying the perspectives of Head Start and school staff about developing their specific collaborative agreements.

Participants. Qualitative inquiry involves focusing on a relatively few number of cases in order to develop an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2008). In this project, an intensity

sampling strategy was employed to select cases that strongly represent the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). Cases that seemed to represent well-formulated collaborative agreements based on the document analysis and the HSSCO director's knowledge of Nebraska partnerships were selected for potential participation. Following procedures approved by UNL's Institutional Review Board, potential participants were contacted by email in the summer of 2009 and invited to participate in an interview and complete an informed consent procedure. For each participating partnership, the Head Start director was interviewed first and asked to recommend individuals from partner schools that should also be contacted for an interview. The analysis of the interviews also informed participant selection by broadening the research team's interpretations of collaborative agreements.

Twenty individuals were contacted in the summer of 2009, and a total of 8 agreed to participate. Participants held the following job titles at the time their agreement was developed: Head Start director ($n = 4$), program coordinator ($n = 1$), superintendent ($n = 1$), education and disability specialist ($n = 1$), and principal ($n = 1$). The participants worked in four regions of Nebraska: northeastern, eastern, central, and south central. Six women and two men were interviewed, but all quotes will be addressed as feminine in this article in order to protect confidentiality.

Qualitative interviews. The research team developed and pilot tested an interview protocol. The research assistant conducted semi-structured interviews via telephone at a time that was convenient for participants. The semi-structured protocol consisted of 10 questions to help us learn about the process of developing collaborative agreements (see Appendix). During the interviews, the interviewer probed for more detailed information related to the elements included in their formal partnership agreements and the process of developing them. Interviews

lasted 40 minutes to one hour each and were audio recorded.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews. Team members prepared verbatim transcriptions of all interviews. The interviews combined to produce an extensive qualitative database about the meaning and development of collaborative agreements. The 8 transcripts totaled 187 single-spaced pages and were imported into MAXQDA2007, a qualitative data analysis software package that facilitates the analysis of open-ended data.

Analysis of the interviews was consistent with systematic qualitative grounded theory procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2008). The grounded theory analysis consisted of three main steps: open coding, constant comparative analysis, and axial coding. Open coding involves breaking the data apart and describing its meaning. Each transcript was divided into text segments and each segment was coded for meaning. Analysis of the first transcripts provided a list of open codes, which were subsequently refined through the data analysis process. As the open coding progressed, the technique of constant comparative analysis was used: finding similarities and differences by comparing present and past codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Codes that were found to be similar were grouped together into larger themes.

Open coding was followed by axial coding to identify categories and their properties as well as their relationships (Creswell, 2007). Axial coding produced codes related to the *central process* and the *causal conditions, contexts, strategies, and outcomes* related to this process. The codes were developed into a model that explained the process of developing a collaborative agreement. A model was prepared for each partnership, and then a composite model was developed representing a general explanation of the process.

Validity in qualitative research is defined as how accurately the findings represent participants' realities (Creswell & Miller, 2000). We used several validation procedures including

keeping an audit trail through memos, having multiple analysts, and providing quotes as evidence. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing the model with statewide Head Start directors and partners and participants' feedback was incorporated into the overall analysis and confirmed the validation of the findings.

Results

Three types of results emerged from the analysis of the documents and interviews in response to our research questions. First, we delineate the elements found within formal collaborative agreements. Second, we describe the steps of the process for developing collaborative agreements. Third, we describe the conditions, contexts, strategies, and outcomes related to this collaborative development process.

What are collaborative agreements? The document analysis and interviews indicated that a collaborative agreement is a formal written document that highlights the school and Head Start's common vision, goals, purpose, and objectives for providing early childhood services. It also clarifies the separate and joint responsibilities of each party. Indicating the complexity of the different types of documents that fall under the umbrella term of "collaborative agreements," several terms were found within the documents and used by interview participants to refer to the formal agreement. Examples of terms that were used in the document titles included "memorandum," "agreement," "contract," "partnership," "collaboration," "commitment," "cooperative," and "understanding." Based on interview data and member checking, it was found that participants also described collaborative agreements in various ways. Some of the individuals who worked with early childhood agreements referred to them as: "partnership contract agreements," "early childhood education program agreement," and "MOU." Others described them more generally, such as "memorandum," "agreement," and "the document." The

people who worked specifically with disability agreements referred to these documents as "interagency cooperative agreement," "MOU," and "agreements." The variety of terms speaks to the complexity and universality of the process of developing collaborative agreements.

The current agreement documents ranged from 1 to 8 pages in length and addressed numerous topics. Table 1 presents a summary of the components of collaborative agreements that emerged from the document analysis. The first column indicates the major topic categories (e.g., partnership parameters) and the specific elements identified within each topic category (e.g., partnership type and name). The final column briefly describes examples of the different perspectives found for each element across the 102 documents.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

As shown in Table 1, four major themes emerged from the documents: partnership parameters, partnership requirements, partnership responsibilities, and partnership terms. *Partnership parameters* referred to the partnership's demographic information, including its type, its name, who is involved, the target audience, and the overall goals. *Partnership requirements* refer to any constraints that the partnership has to operate under that were explicitly identified within the agreement document. As shown in the table, these requirements ranged from standards, laws, and regulations to personnel requirements to classroom environment considerations. *Partnership responsibilities* indicated the specific responsibilities for each involved party: school, Head Start partner, and joint responsibilities. These responsibilities covered a wide range of topics such as implementation, fiscal, bureaucratic, and child outcome responsibilities and made up the majority of information included across the documents. *Partnership terms* were stipulations of the agreement, such as the agreement dates, evaluation terms, terms for modification, and final signatures.

The elements that resulted from the document analysis in Table 1 were confirmed by the interviews. However, there was greater variety and detail found in the document analysis than emerged in the interviews. Generally, interview participants mentioned only a few of the categories. The two categories emphasized consistently by participants were: standards, laws, and regulations (especially federal Head Start standards and Nebraska's Rule 11) and partnership responsibilities. Examples of responsibilities highlighted include days and hours of operation, calendar, compensation, and nutrition and meal service. At least one participant stressed that confidentiality and insurance are essential elements to be addressed in agreements, but they were not major components that emerged from the document analysis.

What is the process for developing collaborative agreements? The analysis of the interviews identified four major stages in the process of developing collaborative agreements , as shown in Figure 1. These stages provide a comprehensive overview of the process; not every individual or partnership experiences each step. The major stages are initiating pre-partnership procedures, building relationships, developing the agreement, and modifying and maintaining the partnership. Each stage is associated with specific steps, as described in the following sections.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Initiating pre-partnership procedures. As indicated by participants, the first major phase of the process for developing collaborative agreements is initiating pre-partnership procedures. The steps that emerged within this stage include approaching potential funding sources and partners, making initial contacts, and preparing the early childhood grant application. These actions are displayed within a triangle in Figure 1 to show these steps only occur one time in a partnership's process.

The process can begin with individuals approaching potential funding sources and

partners. One participant described approaching the state's Early Childhood Office and Head Start directly for information. Another participant's previous experiences with Head Start played an important role in choosing Head Start among programs. Head Start and state offices, however, were not the only parties approached by participants in this initial stage. One participant discussed contacting people in the community when initiating a pre-K program:

So that required truly getting other people involved that would be interested being partnering with us to accomplish the same goals. So that meant community members, other programs such as Head Start, programs within the community, school people, the State Department of Education.

Thus, her approach included members of the community, particularly individuals or groups that had similar experience or shared goals.

Another step that emerged within the initiating pre-partnership procedures stage is making initial contacts. Participants that discussed this step identified a broad range of people who are included in initial meetings, such as assistant directors, area managers, executive directors, superintendents, principals, and special education directors. In these first meetings, several important topic areas are addressed, such as the curriculum, ongoing assessments, screenings, parent involvement, meal requirements, teacher qualifications, nutrition and health, and recruiting. In addition, Head Start directors discussed several tools that help facilitate the process. One individual mentioned bringing a brochure of a current program to share with the school staff. Another helpful tool in the first meeting for some directors was an annual community assessment that was used to demonstrate the need for Head Start within that community. Several directors also alluded to the challenge of introducing school personnel to the overwhelming length of the Head Start Performance Standards, and one discussed creating a

one-page overview of the standards to explain them to school staff “so that way they would have a major overview.”

A third step that emerged within the pre-partnership procedures stage is preparing the grant application for early childhood funding, although not all partnerships begin with a grant. Preparing the grant application includes work done on developing the grant, such as writing the grant application collaboratively, mapping out a plan, setting up a timeline, training on everyone's responsibilities, and orientations. Applying for the grant seems to be an involved process that at times is difficult for the school staff. One participant described this challenge:

So that is one of their most frightful pieces, I think, is putting the grant application together and then knowing how much will it cost to blend the funds and the program to expand and that it takes more than what the state dollars provide.

Thus, balancing the school's needs with the amount of funding that will be granted emerged as an important issue. One participant also talked about establishing a timeline that outlined what had to be done to prepare the grant application and who would do it.

Participants indicated that the step of preparing the grant application includes meetings. Topics of discussion at these meetings included the recruitment process, Performance Standards, and writing the grant. Family service specialists, education specialists, Head Start directors, and other school staff participated in these meetings. One participant conveyed the collaborative nature of this step:

Initially I sit down with them and we map out what our plan is what we are going to do, what our dreams are...And usually after a year of being together we apply for the early childhood money. And then we sit down and write that grant together.

Thus, the process of working on the grant can be collaborative from the start.

Building relationships. The second major phase of the process that emerged is building relationships among the parties involved, which is shown as an oval in Figure 1 to demonstrate that this is a dynamic process. The facets of this phase are (a) technical: steps following grant acceptance, (b) theoretical: deciding the partnership model, and (c) people-oriented: develop relationships.

Technical steps involved in building relationships include hiring teachers and para-educators, preparing the classroom, addressing issue of space, and reviewing the lunch program. One participant emphasized the urgency of the steps following grant acceptance: "As soon as the grant was awarded we were able to begin advertising, interviewing and getting staff hired and trained so that we could start the program year the end of August, first part of September." Thus, the technical steps are time-sensitive. Other technical steps after grant acceptance mentioned by participants include outlining administrative responsibilities, determining how money and grant funding will work, meeting requirements and standards, and quality assurance procedures.

Another step of relationship building is to decide on the appropriate partnership model and overall mission for collaboration between Head Start and the school. One participant described the partnership model as to how the responsibilities would be divided up:

The way I understand it is Head Start can have different kind of memberships or partnerships. Either for example make it do the preschool or have the preschool in the facility oversee it, or you could partner with us and do it like what we're doing.

Thus, the partnership model can refer to how extensive Head Start's role will be in the collaboration. Others described the importance of identifying a common goal or mission statement, and one participant elaborated on why developing this early was important: "I guess

I'm a firm believer that we all have to know what our goal is and what we are working for." Another participant stated that a lack of common goals caused struggles among people. Thus, developing a vision helped to clarify people's expectations and goals at the outset and was a crucial step in the process of collaboration.

Participants described the third step of relationship building as people-oriented. Within this step, participants discussed meetings that helped to outline people's responsibilities and developing a brochure of the program to share with others. One participant describes the general process of building relationships as conversations that delineated "who does what, when and how." Another participant emphasized the extensive time it takes to develop relationships: a year and a half or longer.

Developing the agreement. The third phase of the process, developing the formal agreement document, is oval-shaped in Figure 1 to indicate that it is a dynamic, on-going process. The steps that emerged include developing the mission statement and breaking it into objectives. Participants described integrating sources of information that were used in creating the first draft of the agreement document. They integrated standards, requirements, and regulations to develop the agreement, such as Head Start Performance Standards and state Special Education requirements. One participant raised the issue of managing different standards. As she described, reviewing various standards meant selecting the most stringent one as the one to use for the agreement. For some, pulling together information differed based on the type of agreement. After describing how various sources of information were integrated for early childhood grants, one participant explained that the process for disability agreements was different because their goal was to "get as many services that we can into the Head Start classrooms without a pullout." Whereas integrating sources of information for early childhood

grants or preschool partnerships seem to be related to standards, the disability information may refer more to appropriating staff and services.

Another step of developing the agreement that emerged is the use of a template and can entail developing or receiving a template. Participants described the use of a template in several ways: receiving a sample template from involved parties, utilizing a state-wide memorandum of agreement, and incorporating previous agreements. One participant describes receiving a template in one of the initial meetings by a presenter at a Head Start meeting. The use of a state-wide and a standardized memorandum of agreement also emerged from the interviews. Head Start directors and the education and disability specialist had the luxury of being able to use agreement documents with which they had previously worked. One participant described starting with a basic template and customizing it for each partner. Not all participants described the use of a template. One mentioned using only “bits and pieces” from other agreements. Another described creating a matrix of responsibilities as the initial step in writing. Thus, although the use of a template was viewed as important by several participants, it was not the only way to start writing the agreement.

Participants described sharing and discussing the agreement as the subsequent step in the process. One Head Start director addressed sharing the template, discussing any changes that occurred in relation to their school district and then interacting with the school in person or via email. The sharing of the document was also discussed by a member of the school staff, who said Head Start brought them the initial draft and they subsequently had regular planning meetings. Another participant described refining the document as evolving from general to more specific:

We outlined things in a more definitive way and in the beginning it was somewhat general because we didn't know a lot of things, we didn't know a lot of specifics. But in time, we were able to get down to fairly specific issues.

Thus, sharing and discussing the agreement is an involved process that moves from general to specifics. Several participants noted that Head Start takes the lead in sharing the agreement with school personnel such as superintendents, principals, and speech providers. Participants indicated that Head Start makes this initial step because their staff members are familiar with the standards and regulations.

Once the formal agreement is prepared, individuals initiate signature procedures to obtain the required written approval for the agreement. Individuals discussed collecting signatures by mailing the agreements to school staff. One participant mentioned that the number of signatures vary by the number of schools that are involved in the partnership. Another participant highlighted the differences in signature procedures for early childhood and disability agreements. Although some stated that early childhood and disability partnerships had similar procedures, she explained that in her case, the former type get signed at the educational service unit level whereas the disability ones are signed at the planning region level.

Modifying and maintaining the collaboration. The curved arrows in Figure 1 represent modifying and maintaining the collaboration after the first year. One participant described that by the time they reached the modification phase, they knew what they were doing and did it as a team:

The following year we tweaked all of that and we got better at what we were doing... We did that together, that wasn't one thing at that point that I did, or we did as a public school, or they did as Head Start organization. We did it together.

Modifying the agreement, just as with the rest of the agreement, can be a supportive, collaborative process.

Participants indicated that one way that people maintained this collaboration after the first year was to hold ongoing meetings. Various individuals attended these meetings with key people including: Head Start directors or executive director, local Head Start Center site director, Head Start State Collaboration director, special education director, elementary principals, and superintendents. The meetings also involve local and state representatives to help inform the development, such as early childhood systems directors and related state agency representatives (e.g, Department of Health and Human Services). The frequency of meetings ranged from monthly to quarterly to annual. Topics of discussion at meetings included gaps, barriers, possible improvements and tips for successful partnerships.

Participant findings indicated that revisions after the first year are not just made due to the ongoing meetings; there are also external circumstances that warrant modifications. One major reason for refining the agreement that emerged was changes in standards. One participant discussed the fact that a change in the state's Rule 11 caused her to modify the agreement. Another said the only reason the agreement is modified is due to changes in state and Head Start standards and regulations. However, other participants described a variety of reasons the document would need to be modified: self-monitoring, a new facility, as well as changes in early childhood special education, the community, and the role of the school.

What are the conditions, contexts, strategies, and outcomes of the collaborative process? The model that emerged to explain the process of developing formal collaborative agreements is illustrated in Figure 2. The stages of the process from Figure 1 are at the core of this larger model. This model describes four major components related to this process: causal

conditions, contexts, strategies, and outcomes.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Causal conditions. Causal conditions include factors that initiate or influence the process at the outset (Creswell, 2007). Several conditions emerged that describe how collaborative partnerships are first initiated. In some cases, the process started when a key stakeholder determined that the community may benefit from a Head Start program and from trying to maximize resources within a community. The stakeholder then initiated a meeting to discuss this idea. A participant emphasized the importance of staying open to the needs of the community in the initial meeting.

You don't want to go into a preconceived, you know, a preconceived agreement on what type of service do they think they want for their community. You know, what are the needs of their community? What are we looking at? Where are we at?

Thus, the participant tried hard to release preconceived notions and listen to what the school needed from the partnership. Another participant realized that support was needed for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade children and families and Head Start could help to provide it. Another initiating condition that emerged was interest in pre-kindergarten programs and preschools. One participant explained that her interest in preschools stemmed from previous professional experiences. Initiation of the idea by the preschool interagency council was discussed, and people who were part of the council were early childhood special education at schools, the school staff, Head Start staff, and the grant programs.

Participants described other causal conditions such as moving the program to a new setting. The start of the statewide Nebraska grant program represents a causal condition. This condition refers to the grant program in the state, not the securing of an individual grant. Thus,

although conversations took place, it was the finalization of the grant program that was attributed as starting some collaborations. Finally, preliminary conversations about the possibility of initiating a program between Head Start and the school emerged as a causal condition.

Contexts. Contexts refer to what Creswell (2007) calls contextual factors and intervening conditions, or broad and situational factors that affect the process and the use of strategies within the process. These factors and conditions influence both the partnership development process as well as the actual information contained within the formal agreement document. One such context discussed by participants included standards, regulations, and policies, such as federal, state, and local restrictions (e.g. grant rules) or general trends (e.g. shifts in attitude or focus). Types of federal standards that the participants discussed were Head Start Performance Standards and USDA nutritional standards. Specific restrictions mentioned by participants related to federal standards included Head Start requirements that aides have to have certain credentials, professional development plans for all employees, and transportation duties. One participant implied that Head Start standards form the basis for the written agreement and others indicated that changes in standards can cause modifications.

State standards include regulations pertaining to the state of Nebraska, such as Nebraska Department of Education Rule 11. One participant elaborated on the importance of the state by observing their role on spending funds, number of hours and days, and the services they provide for the children. Another participant discussed in further detail how the state can produce an impact. She discussed how state and school standards can be different, and that when this occurred, she selected the highest standard. She subsequently explained how she felt the state can "sabotage" that process:

We can have people come in from the state and tell a superintendent that you don't have

to do that. Because we have worked it out with meeting the highest standards through Head Start, that's technically true, but now you have just sabotaged what we just tried to do. So outside influence can make a lot of difference.

The participants who mentioned the influence of the state emphasized its importance. Quality assurance was another standard that emerged from the interviews. One participant described quality assurance as Head Start area managers monitoring checklists for each school district that are shared with superintendents.

Other standards discussed are grant rules and national and state shifts. One participant simply stated that she used the grant application when developing the agreement. National and state shifts reflect general trends that influence the development of the agreement. For example, a participant described the effects of a recent growing emphasis on early childhood collaboration on state trends, awareness on the part of public schools, national shift in focus, and legislative measures.

Time and timing was another major context described by participants. For example, the year of full implementation (that is, how long the partnership has been in existence) emerged as an important context of the process. Participants explained that the bulk of the work in writing the formal agreement is done in the first year, whereas subsequent years involve making updates. The type of calendar for the program is another dimension of the time context. Several individuals mentioned making a decision between using the public school calendar and the Head Start calendar based on different needs. The time of year in which the partnership is developed can determine whether or not an agreement is made that year. One individual described how finding a time to gather the appropriate individuals for meetings was a "huge problem," if not "impossible." Another participant addressed timelines that were required throughout the school

year. Contract renewal due dates can be a problem if all are due at the same time. Finally, one participant emphasized the time commitment to form new partnerships as “of utmost importance for it to continue to state quality.”

Available resources emerged as another important context of the process, especially funding issues. The participants discussed this issue in terms of federal, local, and state dollars. One participant discussed staff being “really stretched thin” and another individual further explained the impact of having little funding through Head Start: “So I keep having to do more and more and more for the same amount of people, and no more money for anybody.” The participant described having more responsibilities with less money. Another participant suggested that some of her locations were looking into charging fees for services, which could potentially impact the parent rights, roles, and responsibilities section of the agreement. Thus, although growth was viewed positively, it could be problematic when unmatched by an increase in funding. Changes in funding could affect how resources are allocated, so it could potentially affect the step, modifying the document after the first year.

Participants also discussed several resources provided by Head Start other than funding. They mentioned a variety of items that Head Start helps with, such as recruiting, applications, management and staffing, providing family service worker, parental activities, helping with teachers and para-educators, assisting with compliance, assessments, answering questions, obtaining necessary resources, training, and the technical assistance systems from the Federal Office of Head Start. Despite the associated problems, the assistance provided by Head Start seemed to outweigh the challenges. Other resources utilized by participants included state resources and professional development opportunities. One participant discussed how the state provides assistance to the schools and education service units through the state or through early

childhood special education. Professional development opportunities were provided for elementary school principals and superintendents.

Program size was another context that emerged from the interviews. One participant stated that some directors had to manage as many as twenty-five counties. When participants discussed the number of schools, they also referred to whether or not the program is in rural area and indicated the proportion of Head Start program to school district. Being in a rural or urban area also emerged as an important theme related to program size. One participant discussed how being staff members in a rural area entailed wearing “several hats.” This wide variety of responsibilities results in less time and resources to monitor the collaboration closely. This idea of multiple roles was confirmed by another participant who indicated that the education and disability specialist's array of responsibilities took away from maintaining the collaboration. Finally, growth in partnerships can constrain resources.

Another context that emerged was the local school context. School policies, which included regulations, can influence collaboration terms because it determines evaluation procedures. As indicated by participants, other contexts pertaining to school are school focus and priorities, resources provided by school, physical facility, and school needs. A Head Start director discussed how she ensured schools were focusing on early childhood education as a goal. Resources provided by the schools were mentioned as a factor. Physical facility was discussed in terms of challenges that occur with limited space. The needs of the school are dynamic and subject to change, which impacts the partnership.

As described by participants, the final category of contexts was people's attitudes, beliefs, and demographics. Staff changes, personality, and openness emerged as a major theme. One way that people can influence collaboration is through staff changes because the agreement document

had to be reviewed with all new staff members. Another people-related factor that participants described was the individuals appointed to maintain collaboration. Through describing why these individuals are assigned to that role, one participant explained what is important in the collaboration:

They were appointed because they were open minded and willing to work through whatever difficulty or strategy that needed changing...also came in with a very open understanding of this is what the partnership is, this is what our goals are, this is what we are trying to accomplish and what are we going to do in order to maintain them.

Thus, open-mindedness, similar goals, and understanding emerged as important characteristics of an effective collaboration.

Staff's personalities were consistently emphasized as an important influence on the process. One participant elaborated on how some personalities "just don't jive." On a similar vein, another participant described how working with open people with similar goals was a huge help. Another participant expanded on characteristics she thought were important:

People willing to make the boundaries grey, or greyer, rather than hard black and white types of things...And not be afraid to go through the entities and begin a dialogue about making changes...It comes down to people. People make or break the partnerships.

Thus, open-mindedness, flexibility, and willingness to explore new possibilities were cited as important in maintaining collaboration in the partnership. Two other characteristics of staff that were cited as relevant by other participants were whether they love or hate rules and level of support.

Prior relationships are another significant context that emerged. One Head Start director described how a prior relationship can save time in developing the partnership. Organizations

besides Head Start, the state department of education, and the school can also influence the collaborative relationship. A variety of organizations were named by participants as influential, including colleges and universities, the National Organization of Elementary Principals, and early childhood state and national organizations. Support was also indicated as a helpful use of these organizations.

The context of who was served by the program varied from providing services for 3- and 4-year olds to only providing services for 4 year olds. Openness of the state and Head Start was mentioned by a school staff member who worked with early childhood grants. After describing how they should become more open, she explained that their priorities must be blended:

There are reasons why [the state department of education] has their position and there are reasons why Head Start has theirs. But somewhere along the line, those issues have to be blended and worked through for the benefit of kids, families and the programs that are out there in those communities.

Thus, openness of the state and Head Start was seen as playing a pivotal role in child outcomes.

Strategies. Strategies are actions taken in the process (Creswell, 2007). The process of developing collaborative partnerships is a complex one and participants referred to a variety of strategies for navigating it. Strategies for developing collaborative agreements correspond to the stages of the process of developing agreements: pre-partnership procedures, relationship building, and developing the formal agreement. Table 2 provides an overview of the strategies identified by the participants. Many strategies were discussed within the relationship building stage, indicating that the relationship is at the heart of the process. Although most strategies were briefly mentioned, strategies for communication and building relationships were prominent and thus are explained in further detail below.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The most important strategy by far was communication. It was discussed in the context of early childhood and disability agreements. Communication includes scheduling ongoing meetings, preferably on a frequent basis. Daily contact was mentioned as a way to keep the lines of communication open. Participants used words and phrases such as "open," "open lines," and "close" to describe communication. One participant described how meeting in person helped to "put a face" to a name, and next time she called the school, they remembered who she was. This preference for face-to-face communication was confirmed by other participants, and one described it as more "effective." One participant used an analogy to describe the problematic aspects of poor communication:

I've seen a lot of partnerships with a lot of people going maybe in the same direction, but some are on a train, some are on a speed boat, some are on a rowboat. And you never know when you are going to get there, and how they are going to get there because communication is a problem.

Thus, open communication seems to be an essential element in making partnerships work.

Building relationships was also an important strategy related to general people skills. Although it emerged as an ongoing strategy, it was stressed that building relationships should start early. One participant elaborated on this concept: "And I think that's probably the first strategy that you start with before you go into any form of written partnership or formal agreement. You have to build the relationship first." Thus, building the relationship serves as a foundation for the rest of the process, and the importance of this strategy was underscored by several individuals. One person compared a partnership to a marriage with the people involved to illustrate the importance of having a good relationship. A participant quote illustrates the pivotal

role of relationships well: "The whole thing is built on relationships. It comes down to people." The importance of building relationships cannot be overstated.

Outcomes. Finally, outcomes include consequences that result from the use of the strategies (Creswell, 2007). Participants described that outcomes of developing a collaborative partnership agreement can relate to children and families; staff; and the program. For children and families, one important outcome of the process of developing good agreements was better quality of care for kids. For example, one participant discussed how an assessment called High Scope COR had demonstrated an improvement in child outcomes since program initiation. Another person spoke of closing the achievement gap between different socioeconomic groups. One individual noted that when problems arise, a good collaboration produces "much quicker results" and that creates better services for children.

Participants discussed other outcomes for children and families that they associated with the partnership process, such as more well-behaved kids. Trust from families was viewed as essential and allows the parents to be more confident in the program achieving their goals. One participant explained that the best placement for a child is achieved through good partnership agreements and ongoing communication. Positive collaborations can result in being able to receive immediate feedback about how individual children are doing. Collaborations seemed to also result in more students being served, and especially being able to include non-income qualifying kids. More opportunities for children was explained eloquently by one participant: "What I always tell staff is that we are dream makers and our goal is to make sure our kids have the skills so that when they graduate they can do anything they want because they have the skills to do it." Participants identified opening opportunities and helping children achieve their dreams as important consequences. Academic results were also indicated as an outcome of meaningful

agreements. One school staff member talked about reaching kids sooner that need help, especially concerning children with speech difficulties.

Participants also relayed outcomes associated specifically with parents. They explained that the outcome of parents being less intimidated, was a result of having a liaison between the school staff and the parent as part of the partnership. The fact that Head Start "initiates" and "oversees" parental activities seems to result in an increase in parent involvement. Another participant explained that good collaborations can improve parent's past impressions of a school district. Finally, one participant indicated that improving parenting skills as part of the partnership activities +also results in academic improvements.

Participants also discussed outcomes associated with the staff, such as having the responsibilities clear, staff being on "same page" and positive relationships. One benefit to having responsibilities clear was that everyone had a better understanding of where other parties were coming from. The importance of staff being on the "same page" was emphasized by one participant: "Everybody's on the same page. We all have the same vision, the same goals, and we are all on the same train getting there...And I can't describe you know, how important that really is." The outcome of positive relationships was explained in terms of the school district, service providers, and teachers.

Participants identified additional outcomes for staff. They described staff as being more understanding, less overwhelmed, more accountable, and more productive when the process of developing a collaborative agreement worked well. One individual explained that the agreement prevents forgetting and helps to keep their "ducks in a row." Another person indicated that a meaningful agreement results in less fear, distraction, and "everything else that impedes moving forward." A participant said that good agreements result in decreased questions, which allows

development of more partnerships. Other outcomes include additional opportunities for partnerships and a rich learning environment.

Participants also discussed outcomes related to the program such as maximizing resources and strengthening the program. Maximizing resources was explained in terms of the collaboration being able to provide training, resources, and home services. A meaningful agreement can also make the program "stronger" and of "high quality." Another participant described how the agreement provides a starting point in identifying problems and their causes. An increase in the number of partnerships is another outcome that emerged. Finally, a meaningful agreement can increase credibility of the program.

Discussion

By examining actual collaborative agreements and interviewing individuals who work to shape these agreements, this study has described both the content that goes into formal agreement documents as well as the process by which these agreements are developed. Basically, a collaborative agreement is a document that represents the school and Head Start's common vision, goals, purpose, and objectives and that details the separate and joint responsibilities of each party. The information contained in the agreements pertains to the partnership's parameters, requirements, responsibilities, and terms.

The research question that concerned the process of how agreements are developed was explored in the interviews. A model was developed that illustrates a four-step process: initiating pre-partnership procedures, building relationships, developing formal agreements, and modifying after the first year. A second model highlighted the collaborative process and included the causal conditions, contexts, strategies, and outcomes associated with the process. In terms of causal conditions, partnerships can be initiated by Head Start personnel, school staff, and the

development of a state program. The main contexts that influence the process include standards and people's attitudes, beliefs and demographics. Strategies were wide-ranging and often pertained to specific steps of the process. Consequences of a good agreement were associated with positive outcomes for children and families, staff, and the program.

These findings are consistent with the moderate amount of previous research available on collaborative Head Start programs. A Wisconsin resource guide on developing collaborations provides steps in the process of building relationships: networking, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration (Haglund & Larson, 1994). The steps they provide roughly correspond to parts of the model that emerged from talking with our participants. The Illinois State Department of Human Services (2001) provides steps to develop a written agreement, and their only component not directly addressed by our model is increase awareness of strategies, although it was indirectly addressed by the strategy category "Keep all informed." However, our research-based model provides a more comprehensive perspective by including strategies, contexts, specific causal conditions, outcomes, and more detailed information on the process from the perspectives of both Head Start and school personnel.

Formal collaborative agreement documents are complex, representing different types of agreements, different language, and different partnership parameters. Good documents that are part of a partnership that is truly collaborative have the following attributes: "living documents" that change with the program; manageable length; important categories of information; useful when questions arise; and are shared with all relevant stakeholders (administrators and staff). Some participants described always having the document available, whereas others viewed the agreement as a formality that, once created, is only referred to sporadically. Thus, agreements are used in different ways. Disability and early childhood agreements reflected similar information,

but the details were different. The categories of information that were presented in Table 1 can be used as a template of topics to be addressed when writing collaborative agreements.

While the documents themselves are essential to satisfy federal and state requirements and a key context of the process, it was clear that relationship building among people is at the heart of the collaborative process. A significant amount of time goes into developing meaningful relationships and maintaining open communication. Evidence of the importance of relationship building was found in related studies of collaboration, such as with mental health consultants (Green, Everhart, Gordon, & Gettman, 2006) and families (Zhang, Bennett, & Bair Heal, 2002), and early childhood collaboration (Haglund & Larson, 1994). The success of an agreement is dependent on the strength of the relationships among the people involved, so learning to work together to provide the program seemed to lay the foundation for collaboration. Because relationships are at the heart of the process, Head Start directors should allow sufficient time for relationship building to occur. In addition, school partners should make sure their staff is available for ongoing meetings and contact.

Communication emerged as a major theme. In the pre-partnership procedures stage, communication consists primarily of Head Start educating schools on how to complete the grant application. School employees are often unfamiliar with this process. Furthermore, it was noted as important to ensure that Head Start staff members are on the same page prior to interacting with the school. In the relationship building stage, communication consists of coming together as a team and making sure both parties are involved in decision-making. Having open communication in this stage is crucial for building a strong collaboration. The conversations that occur within the writing and modifying stages consist of refining and updating the agreement.

While support at the state level has generally focused on partnerships once they receive a

grant, this study highlighted the extensive amount of work and important foundations developed during the pre-partnership procedures. Support should be provided to help programs develop collaborative relationships from these early stages. Although this is a time-consuming process, participants consistently remarked that collaborating is a worthwhile investment. Writing the agreement can be facilitated by the use of sample templates, which was highly recommended by some individuals. The templates should provide general guidelines but allow flexibility at the local level. Furthermore, training on models for conducting needs assessment and program development would be helpful in the initial stages. Because the Head Start Performance Standards are so extensive and intimidating, coaching Head Start staff on how to communicate them to schools would be helpful.

The complexity of the process suggests that individuals need certain skills and attitudes to best facilitate the collaborative process. There are several skills that are important for Head Start directors and school staff to possess when developing collaborations. Head Start directors should be organized, upfront, intelligent, self-motivated, open, friendly, intuitive, and flexible. They are able to relate to and communicate effectively with a wide range of individuals. Ideally, directors should possess sales experience and charisma and be willing to work long hours. School personnel should be open, communicate and listen well, and be dedicated, detail-oriented, patient, resourceful, and intelligent. The best school staff will be self-starters who are open to change. If someone is new to this process, it is most important for the individual to know that developing collaborations is a significant procedure that takes time. The best strategy is to keep open lines of communication throughout the process and use the agreement to highlight each party's responsibilities in detail. Both parties should try to involve community and family members in their efforts.

It is important to note the limitations of this research. The number of participants is low for grounded theory methods. Creswell (2007) recommends obtaining enough to ensure the data is saturated, such as 20 to 30. Due to time and budget constraints, we were only able to complete eight interviews, but a great deal of information emerged about the process. A second limitation is that the study was limited to the state of Nebraska. Further research should examine this process in additional contexts to see if other steps emerge. Participants were selected in part by their current agreement documents, but the interviews revealed that the agreements do not always reflect the strength of the partnership. However, this limitation was somewhat remedied by the fact that the content expert offered her guidance in participant selection. Due to the strengths-based selection process, the emergent theory focuses on partnerships that are successfully collaborative and does not include perspectives of individuals participating in dysfunctional or failed partnerships. The limitations do not preclude this study from providing valuable insight into the process of developing collaborative agreements, and may help to identify best practices. Further research could test this theory more broadly to identify if certain steps in the process are significant indicators for partnership success.

The present study fulfills an important gap in the research. A model of the process of writing collaborative agreements was developed. The steps provide a guide for Head Start and school staff interested in starting partnerships. Furthermore, a theory of the process grounded in participants' experiences was developed which can serve as a guide to individuals who are unfamiliar with the often intimidating process of collaboration. Having a model complete with real-world strategies will supply educators, collaborators, and policy makers with concrete ways to understand and navigate the process of collaboration from start to finish. This theory highlights various factors that can contribute to the success of a partnership. Thus, the present

research is the first research-based model of the process of developing agreements from the perspectives of those who work with them closely.

References

- Bracken, S. S. & Fischel, J. (2007). Relationships between social skills, behavioral problems, and school readiness for Head Start children. *NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field*, *10*, 109-126.
- Bruckman, M. & Blanton, P. W. (2003). Welfare-to-work single mothers' perspectives on parent involvement in Head Start: Implications for parent-teacher collaboration. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *30*, 145-150.
- Corbin, J. M. & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, *39*, 124-131.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Dickinson, D. K., Darrow, C. L., & Tinubu, T. A. (2008). Patterns of teacher-child conversations in Head Start classrooms: Implications for an empirically grounded approach to professional development. *Early Education and Development*, *19*, 396-429.
- Domitrovich, C. E., Gest, S. D., Gill, S., Jones, D., & DeRousie, R. S. (2009). Individual factors associated with professional development training outcomes of the Head Start REDI program. *Early Education and Development*, *20*, 402-430.
- Garces, E., Thomas, D., & Currie, J. (2002). Longer-term effects of Head Start. *The American Economic Review*, *92*, 999-1012.

- Green, B., Everhart, M., Gordon, L., & Gettman, M. (2006). Characteristics of effective mental health consultation in early childhood settings: Multilevel analysis of a national survey. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 26*, 142-152.
- Haglund, J. & Larson, N. (1994). *Collaboration: Because it's good for children & families*. (Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction). Portage, WI: Great Lakes Resource Access Project.
- Office of Head Start. (2009). *Head Start Program Information Report, 2008-09*. Retrieved from <http://hses.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/pir>
- Horn, W. F. (2005). *Biennial report to Congress: The status of children in Head Start programs*. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/biennial_report_2005.pdf
- Illinois State Department of Human Services. (2001). *Guidebook to developing a collaborative partnership written agreement*. (Illinois State Department of Human Services). St. Louis, IL: Illinois Head Start State Collaboration Office.
- Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act, 42 U.S.C. & 9801 (2007).
- Iruka, I. U. (2009). Ethnic variation in the association between family structures and practices on Child Outcomes at 36 months: Results from Early Head Start. *Early Education and Development, 20*, 148-173.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- National Alliance of Business, Inc. (1998). *Family partnerships: A continuous process*. (Training guides for the Head Start learning community). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- National Head Start Association. (2009a). *Basic Head Start facts* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from

http://www.nhsa.org/files/static_page_files/399A3EB7-1D09-3519-ADB004D2DAFA33DD/BasicHeadStartFacts.pdf

National Head Start Association. (2009b, December 18). *Join us for the 2010 Leadership Institute in January*. [Legislative E-Update]. Retrieved from <http://www.nhsa.org/>

Office of Child Support Enforcement. (2003). *Child support, child care, and Head Start collaboration: Innovations and ideas* (Department of Health and Human Services Publication). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sekino, Y. & Fantuzzo, J. (2005). Validity of the Child Observation Record: An investigation of the relationship between COR dimensions and social-emotional and cognitive outcomes for Head Start children. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 23*, 242-260.

Stebbins, H. & Scott, L. C. (2007). *Better outcomes for all: Promoting partnerships between Head Start and State Pre-K* (Center for Law and Social Policy document ED 19). Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

Vermont State Dept. of Education. (2005). Supporting children with disabilities and their families. An interagency agreement among early care, health and education programs and agencies in Vermont. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Zhang, C., Bennett, T., & Bair Heal, H. (2002). The development of family partnership agreement in Early Head Start: The need for a relationship-based approach. *The Journal of Early Education and Family Review, 10*, 15-28.

Table 1

The Elements Found within the Collaborative Agreement Documents

Major Categories and Specific Elements	Examples of Ways in which the Elements Were Implemented Across the Documents
Partnership Parameters:	
Partnership type	Specify whether services are for preschool/early childhood education services and/or for children with disabilities.
Partnership name	Distinct name for the partnership
Who is involved in collaboration	May include educational service units, schools, Head Start programs and individuals such as teachers, speech/language pathologists, mental health professionals, special education directors, medical, dental, and nutritional staff
Program target audience	Indication of target age range and/or eligibility requirement (e.g. special ed, income, and Head Start)
Purpose, objectives, goals, and mission of the agreement	Delineated the relationship between partners, provision of services, coordination of resources, clarification of responsibilities, and education. Can be specified for each section.
Partnership Requirements:	
Standards, laws, and regulations	Restrictions set by Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start guidelines, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; non-specified federal and state regulations; Head Start Performance Standards; Head Start Code of Conduct; No Child Left Behind Act; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law 99-457, Head Start Act: Public Law 110-134
Local policies that govern how partnership works	Policies related to school districts, local agencies, food and safety sanitation regulations, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Interlocal Cooperation Act
Personnel requirements	Required certifications, titles, workshops, orientations, staff developments, techniques, in-service training and technical support
Parent rights, roles and responsibilities	Rights of a parent, how parental involvement will be encouraged throughout the process (e.g. help develop individual program plan), and responsibilities (e.g. signing appropriate forms)
Facilities and materials	Provision of space (e.g. lunchroom), maintenance, equipment, toys, furniture

Classroom environment considerations	Information related to classroom space, staffing, and appropriate classroom environment
Screening/assessment of children	Includes screening, evaluation, and reporting procedure and who is responsible for them. Screenings done for health, development, behavior, disabilities, and senses.
Representation on committees or groups	Details mandatory committees or meetings
Partnership Responsibilities:	
Joint responsibilities shared by the Head Start partner and the school	Delineated in terms of outcomes (e.g. promote child development), communication (e.g. notification procedures), and implementation (e.g. use of transportation) Responsibilities pertain to all categories in this table.
School responsibilities	May include transportation, providing space, paperwork, reimbursement, recruitment, allowing access, encouraging parental involvement, serve as fiscal agent, refer students, submit grant paperwork, provide transition info to families, engage staff in professional development and develop individual education program (IEP)/Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). Responsibilities pertain to all categories in this table.
Partner responsibilities	May include implementing program, providing transition info to families, receiving parental permission, participation in self-assessments, recruitment, providing support, increase participation, share information, and manage referrals. Responsibilities pertain to all categories in this table.
Partnership Terms:	
Start and end dates and duration of agreement	Agreements began and started in the summer months and lasted 10 months, 1 year, or 2 years.
Evaluation terms	Description of how frequently (e.g., at least annually) and in what ways (e.g., site visit or performance appraisals) the partnership will be evaluated, including activities that will be monitored and intervals. Some provided section on professional development, including ongoing communication (e.g. IEP strategies, child's progress updates, communicating with teacher, and staff training).
Terms for modifying the agreement	Details such as when contract will be reviewed, renegotiation terms, notice required for termination, potential reasons for termination, and internal dispute resolution procedures.

People who signed the agreement	One to 5 signatures including representatives of the school or school district (e.g. superintendent, administrator, special education director, education coordinator), Head Start (e.g. director, executive director, policy council chairperson), and the county (e.g., health department services coordinator).
---------------------------------	--

Table 2

Strategies Used to Develop Collaborative Agreements

Major categories	Strategies
Pre-partnership procedures	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide overview of each party’s prospective responsibilities • Simplify Head Start standards when introducing them to school personnel • Assess community needs and speak with community professionals • Research existing programs • Secure multiple partnerships
Relationship building	
Initial steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share common goals • Discuss some topics early (e.g., health requirements, transportation, physicals, screenings, home visits, and parent teacher conferences) • Give center its own identity • Start the process early • Make sure all Head Start staff share a common vision before working with school personnel
General people skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate well with all involved • Build relationships with key personnel • Understand where people are coming from • Give and take • Hire good staff • Use intuition • Balance openness with maintaining identity • Listen • Get people to be open • Make people feel comfortable
Who to contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek help from others with experience • Use Head Start as a resource • Approach people in town who can help • Contact schools • Talk to someone in power about developing collaboration

Keep all informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify roles, benefits, and constraints • Educate school personnel on standards • Involve all parties in meetings • Teach parents to be advocates • Educate self about early childhood education • Develop list of terms • Give copies of agreement to everyone • Share child outcomes • Disseminate weekly newsletter
Developing formal agreement	
Initial steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate on mission statement • Review agreement samples • Do not rely on what is existing • Delineate clearly from beginning • Use template that fits local context • Start with previous agreement
Organizational techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop matrix to organize each party's responsibilities (based on standards) • Organize documents for each partnership in its own binder • Develop a one-page budget spreadsheet • Make agreement a manageable length • Follow order of child evaluation • Work outside daytime hours
Writing agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage different standards • Think in terms of outcome • Scrutinize agreement
Ongoing contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss key topics (e.g., how Head Start can help school districts, finances, budgets, bills, and project enrollment) • Involve Head Start in agreement changes • Schedule regular ongoing meetings

Figure 1

Process of Developing Collaborative Agreements

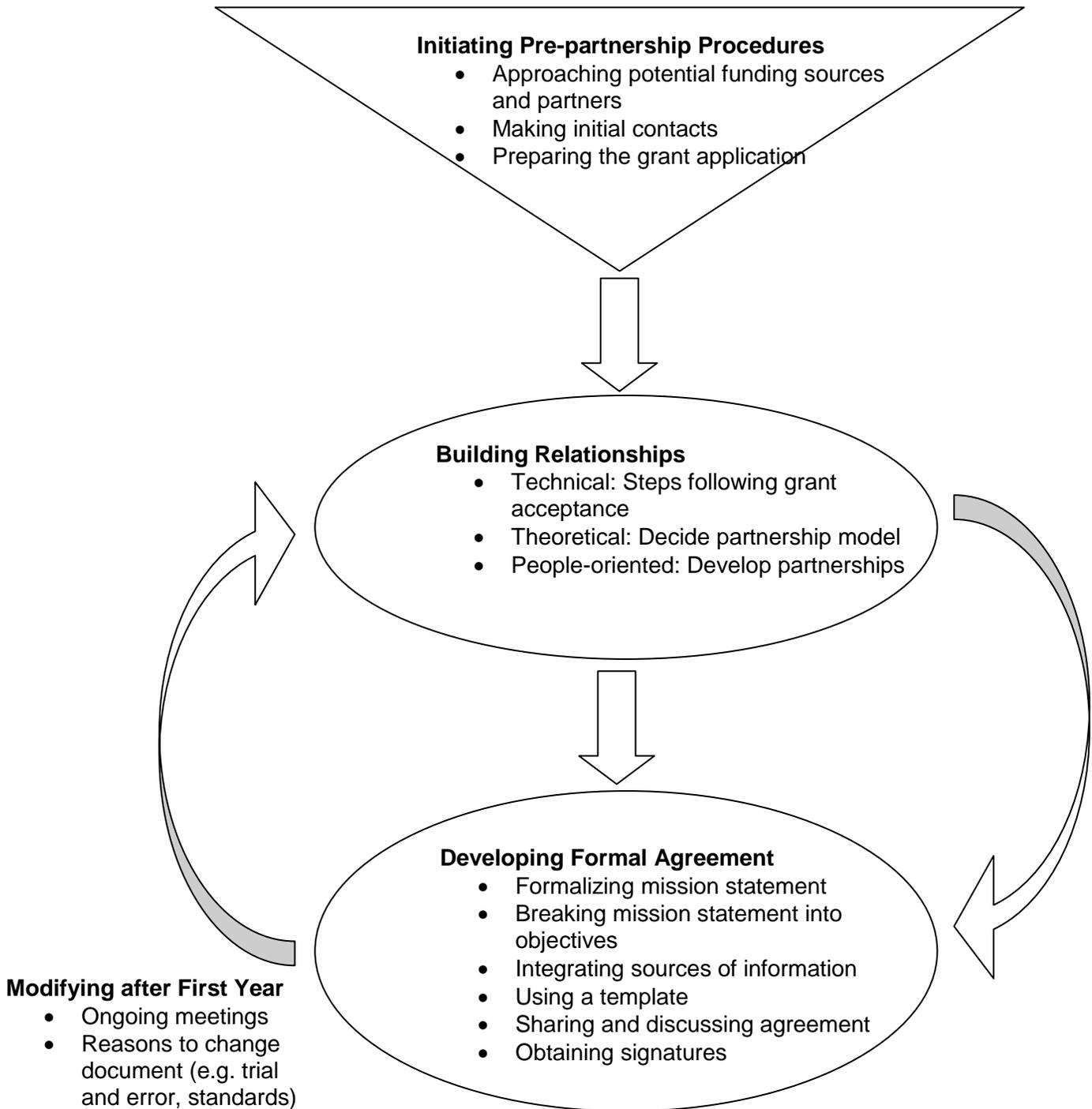
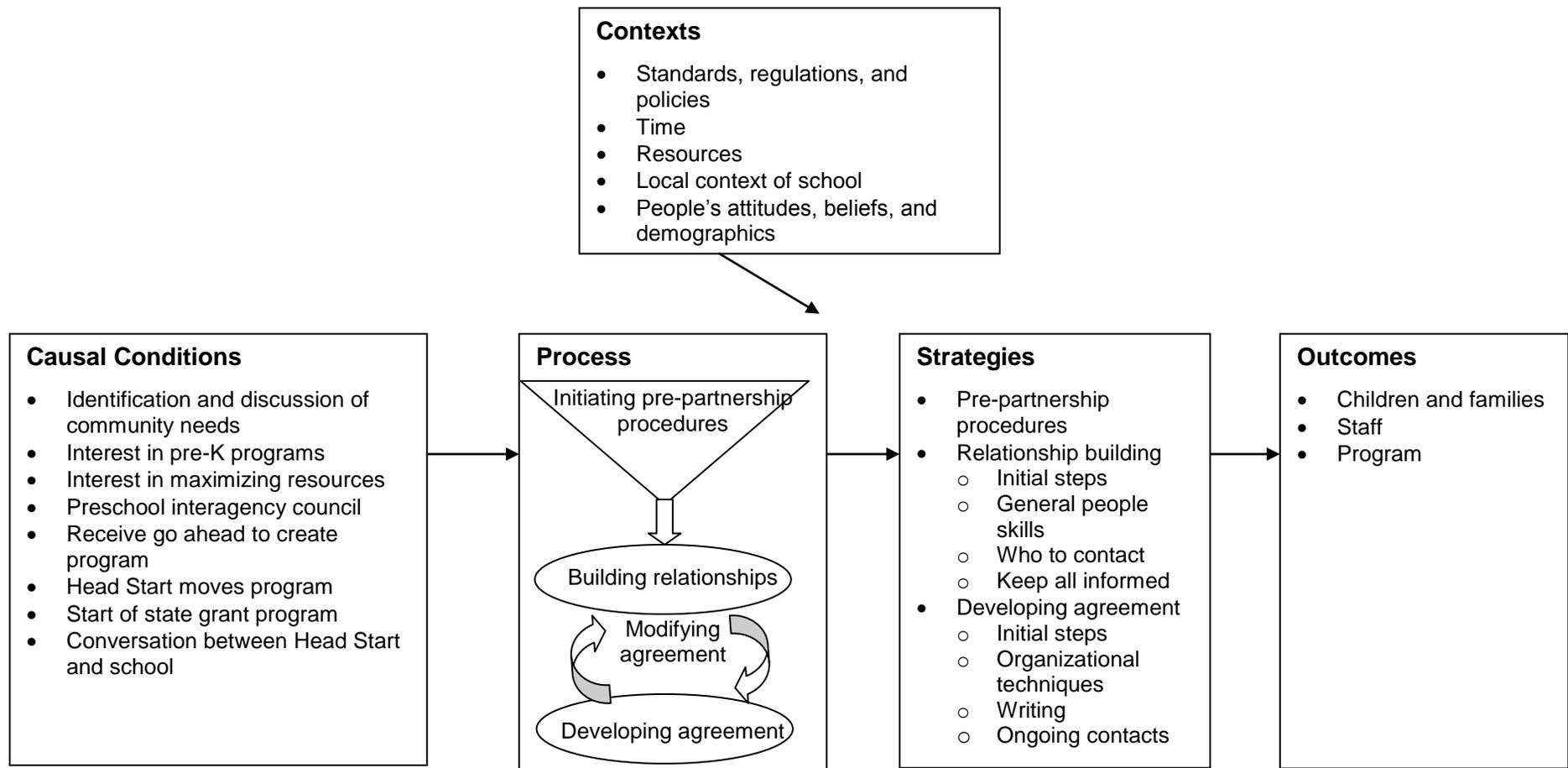


Figure 2

Causal Conditions, Contexts, Strategies and Outcomes Associated with the Collaborative Process



Appendix

Interview Protocol for Head Start Directors and School Personnel

1. First, tell me a little about your role as a Head Start (*director or partner*) in your early childhood partnership [*icebreaker question*]
 - *Probe for how long have you been in this position?*

Now I want to focus on your experiences with memoranda of agreement.

2. What elements are included in your partnership agreements?
 - *Probe for unique aspects of agreement*
3. Please describe the development of your partnership agreement.
4. What strategies have you used in making a partnership agreement?
 - *Are there people who are appointed to maintain collaboration?*
 - *(If yes) How do they contribute to the collaboration?*
5. What contexts influence the extent of collaboration in your partnership agreement?
 - *What resources are available to assist you in your collaboration?*
 - *Probe for other contexts, such as time*
6. What are some of the results of having a meaningful partnership agreement?
 - *What are the results for the people you work with?*
7. How do partnership agreements convey meaningful collaboration?
School partners only: What kinds of things can your Head Start partner do to help make the process more collaborative?
8. What advice would you offer to other individuals considering the development a collaborative agreement?
9. What else can you add to help me understand collaborative agreements?
10. *Head Start directors only:* Who from your partnership schools would you recommend that I consider contacting to help me understand the process from their perspective?
 - *Probe to get at least 2 individuals (get name & school info)*