In recent years interorganizational collaboration has increasingly been emphasized as an important step for addressing inefficiencies in the delivery of human services. Among the many benefits of collaboration described by human service authors are the creation of a more consumer-friendly service system, more efficient use of available resources, and avoiding service duplication. During the Spring and Summer of 1996, six focus groups were conducted in Oregon to assess the quality of collaboration between local social service providers and Even Start, a federally funded family literacy program. The federal Even Start legislation required that all Even Start programs collaborate with social service providers in their local communities to improve services for families and avoid duplication of services.

This study examined data from the Even Start focus groups using a three-level hierarchical model to determine the approximate level of collaboration that existed in each of six Even Start communities. Results of the analysis indicated that collaboration in three of the six Even Start communities was at or near coordination, the middle level of the three-level model. Collaboration in the other three communities appeared to be somewhere below the lowest level of the model, cooperation. Although agencies at such
a minimal level of collaboration may consider each other partners, they are likely to have limited knowledge about each other’s operations and clients.

Because three of six Even Start communities fit below the lowest level of the model, the model had limited utility for this analysis. However, for interagency relationships at higher levels, the model was effective in helping to find the approximate intensity of collaboration. Although the primary focus of the model used in this analysis was on collaboration intensity, a comprehensive evaluation of collaboration would include numerous additional variables, especially outcomes related to the purposes of the interagency relationship.

Several lessons learned during the course of this study have implications for future research. First, by creating data sets that are amenable to examination from multiple perspectives, qualitative methods offer unique flexibility for data collection in secondary circumstances such as the present study. Second, it is likely that collaboration occurs in varied patterns, few of which resemble the highest levels of collaboration advocated by authors in the field. Finally, rather than broadly encouraging human service organizations to move toward the highest levels of collaboration, researchers need to provide answers to basic questions about what forms of collaboration are most helpful, in which circumstances, and why.
Supporting Families through Collaboration: An Analysis of Oregon Even Start Partnerships

by

Dane A. Brinkman

A THESIS submitted to Oregon State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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Dane A. Brinkman, Author
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In response to calls for simple, more family-friendly services, policymakers and administrators are increasingly encouraging social service organizations to collaborate with each other. Collaboration has been encouraged because of its potential to bring fragmented services together, reduce bureaucratic barriers, enhance service provision, and save money (Peck, Steinberg, & Akamatsu, 1995; Lieberman, 1986; Gitlin, Lyons, & Kolodner, 1994; Buckley & Bigelow, 1992). In many instances, collaboration is not merely encouraged, but has become an absolute requirement for obtaining public and private program funds (Crawford & Jones, 1995; Harrison, Lynch, Rosander, & Borton, 1990). It was such a requirement that made data available for this study. This analysis will employ a three-level model developed by Mattessich and Monsey (1992) to determine the approximate level of collaboration between Oregon social service providers and a relatively new family literacy program, Even Start.

During the Spring and Summer of 1996, six focus groups were conducted in Oregon to assess the quality of collaboration between local social service providers and Even Start, a federally funded family literacy program. The Even Start Family Literacy Program began in 1988 when the United States Congress passed Public Law
100-297. The law authorized the Even Start program to improve family literacy, promote parents as their children's first teachers, and enhance the economic conditions of disadvantaged families (Richards & Bailey, 1996). The federal Even Start legislation required that all Even Start programs collaborate with social service providers in their local communities to improve services for families and avoid duplication of services. At the time focus groups were conducted in Oregon, the state had seven operating Even Start programs. Focus groups were conducted in six of these seven Even Start communities.

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather information from organizations that had been collaborating with Even Start programs in providing services to families in their local communities. During the previous year, meetings had been held with staff from Even Start programs to gather data on collaborative efforts. The 1996 focus group meetings were conducted to assess collaborative efforts from the perspective of Even Start partners, therefore Even Start staff members did not participate in the focus groups.

The main goal of the focus groups was a general assessment of the success of local collaboration efforts. However, comments made during the meetings made it appear that the intensity of collaborative activities varied widely between Even Start programs, and some Even Start programs may not have been collaborating much at all. This apparent discrepancy among Even Start programs in implementing collaborative activities led to an examination of what collaboration is supposed to involve and if there are different kinds of or levels of collaboration.
This analysis is based on the work of Mattessich and Monsey (1992), who reviewed 18 studies on interagency collaboration and developed a three-level hierarchy of interagency relationships. This study will involve a thorough analysis of Even Start focus group data, using Mattessich and Monsey's hierarchy as a guide to determine the approximate level of collaboration that existed at the time in each of the six Even Start communities. The analysis should shed light on the utility of the Mattessich and Monsey model while yielding an understanding of Even Start collaboration that would not otherwise be possible. In summary, the following research questions were addressed:

1. On what level of the Mattesich and Monsey model were collaborative efforts in each of the Even Start communities?

2. How useful is the Mattesich and Monsey model for explaining Oregon Even Start collaborative efforts and interorganizational collaboration in general?
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

The Challenge of Collaboration

In spite of the contemporary popularity of the concept of collaboration and the apparent success of many collaborative efforts, implementing a multiagency collaborative effort remains an enormous challenge. Definitions of collaboration are often vague, and interpretations of the term vary so widely as to sometimes render it almost meaningless in practice (Lieberman, 1986; Crawford & Jones, 1995). Researchers describe collaboration as a very complicated process, involving multiple stages, facets, and dynamic relationships (Peck, Sheinberg, & Akamatsu, 1995; Gray, 1985; Flynn & Harbin, 1987). Given the complexity of the concept, it has been difficult to communicate the process of collaboration to service providers in practical terms. Further, policymakers and human service professionals tend to use the term interchangeably with coordination and cooperation, terms with diverse interpretations. Putting collaboration, as defined by the academic world, into practice is often enormously difficult for agencies that for decades have practiced under separate funding streams, mandates, and policies (Gardner, 1989; Crawford & Jones, 1995). Perhaps most importantly, human service organizations continue to be supported by widely differing and sometimes competing constituencies that wield political power on behalf of narrowly defined populations (Gardner, 1989; Szanton, 1995). As if those obstacles were not enough, full collaborative efforts are frequently hampered by
insufficient knowledge, skills, time, money, and personnel (Bevoise, 1986). Would-be collaborators may also have difficulty finding willing partners in their communities, especially in an increasingly competitive funding market.

Challenges notwithstanding, the collaboration movement has grown considerably over the past several years (Chavis, 1995; Crawford & Jones, 1995), making the need to understand the concept even more imperative.

Defining Collaboration

Because of the interactional, dynamic, and developmental nature of interagency coordination and collaboration efforts, describing and evaluating the efforts is like describing a flowing stream. (Harrison, Lynch, Rosander, & Borton, 1990, p. 71)

According to the Merriam-Webster Collegiate dictionary (1995), the term collaborate is derived from the union of the Latin prefix com, meaning together, and the Latin root laborare, which means to labor. Therefore, to collaborate literally means to labor together. From this semantic platform have sprung literally hundreds of attempts to define and describe what it means for organizations to work together. Each description emphasizes different elements of a complex phenomenon, and the differences themselves are instructive. According to Wood and Gray (1991), collaboration occurs "when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain" (p. 147). Hord (1986) emphasized decision-making processes, defining collaboration as "shared decision-making in governance, planning, delivery, and evaluation of programs" (p. 24). Peck, Sheinberg, & Akamatsu
(1995) emphasized commitment: "Collaboration is defined as the process in which several agencies make a formal, sustained commitment to work together to accomplish a common, mutually enhancing mission" (p. 292). Van De Ven (1976) emphasized resource exchanges, stating that an interorganizational relationship occurs "when two or more organizations transact resources (money, physical facilities, and materials, customer or client referrals, technical staff services) among each other" (p. 25). Gardner (1989) defined collaboration from a completely different angle, stating that true collaboration only exists when no new programs begin without the participation of all existing programs in a given domain.

While each of these academic definitions offers a unique and logically valid perspective, they all seem to build on the commonly held meaning for the term collaboration, that of "laboring together." Therefore, to avoid confusion, the term collaboration will be used broadly in this thesis, generally referring to organizations that "labor together" in some manner. This broad definition can serve as an effective focal point for navigating the complexities of collaboration models that follow.

Collaboration Models

While numerous authors have discussed collaboration issues in some detail, relatively few have attempted a comprehensive model of collaboration. Models of collaboration usually describe interorganizational relationships in terms of continua, stages, and levels. Models that use continua analyze collaborative efforts on a series of dimensional scales which create an overall picture of a given collaboration. Stage models describe collaboration as passing through a series of characteristic phases over
time. Hierarchical models typically rank partnerships based on their overall intensity level.

A model proposed by Flynn and Harbin (1987) describes collaboration using both continua and stages. The authors' model of collaboration consists of five dimensions: climate, resources, policies, people, and process. Climate is defined simply as "the atmosphere in which cooperative efforts are attempted" (p. 38). In further explanation the authors write "the attitudes, priorities, and support of key decision makers as well as those of direct service providers and the general populace can enhance collaborative efforts or render them merely impossible" (p. 38). The resources dimension describes "the availability and nature of assets" that influence collaboration efforts (p. 38). The authors listed at least three elements that contribute to the level of resources: money, people, and facilities. Policies are "sets of governing principles which have been established within and among agencies. This includes laws, regulations, standards, guidelines, licensing, certification, and interagency agreements" (p. 38). The authors divide the people dimension into three main categories, facilitator/leader, group members, and key decision makers. Process is defined as "the series of actions or operations used by an interagency group." (p. 39).

Flynn and Harbin described these five dimensions as both interactional and developmental. The dimensions are described as interactional because each of the five can and do effect each of the other dimensions. In addition, the authors describe the five dimensions as dynamic, having the possibility of changing over time. Much of this change, according to the authors, occurs in a predictable sequence. Flynn and Harbin described the people and process dimensions as being closely related and proceeding
together through several stages of development. The authors use the term interagency process to describe the joint trajectory of people and process through predictable developmental stages. Interagency process proceeds through four developmental stages in the model: formation, conceptualization, development, and implementation. During the formation stage, group members form the underlying structure for collaboration. Regarding group formation the authors write:

...attention should be paid to activities such as selecting the members who can facilitate goal accomplishments; creating and sustaining a productive, cooperative atmosphere; developing a decision-making structure to enhance group functioning; delineating and accepting roles and responsibilities. Acceptance of an agreement to a general goal or mission is also a vital part of developing a foundation for future efforts. (p. 39)

During the second stage of interagency process, conceptualization, group members form the "skeleton" of their collaboration plan, outlining their shared philosophy, goals, strategies, and desired impact (p. 40). In the development phase of interagency process, the group puts the "meat on the bones" of their skeleton plan, working out specifically how services will be delivered and by whom (p. 40). Finally, group plans are executed during the implementation stage.

The Flynn and Harbin model provides a clear, detailed foundation upon which an evaluation framework could be constructed. For the purposes of this thesis however, the model is actually too comprehensive. Data used in this study are derived from focus groups that were broad and exploratory in nature. No questions were asked about phases or dimensions of Even Start collaborative efforts, so the Flynn and Harbin model was not appropriate for this analysis.
Perhaps the most common collaboration models are those that rank partnerships based on their overall level of intensity. These models typically refer to each level in their relationship hierarchy using a different term than that used by other theorists, a fact that likely contributes to confusion in the field of collaboration. Davidson's model (1976) consists of five levels, with each succeeding level representing an increasingly complex interorganizational relationship. The first level in the model is communication, which refers to relationships in which organizations are "doing no more than talking together, sharing information, ideas, and feelings about the shape of their shared world" (p. 120). When organizations work together on "some small project," they are said to be cooperating (p. 120). When the relationship becomes more formal and "the tasks more clearly limited and well defined" (p. 120), the relationship is called a confederation. A federation exists when goals and tasks are precisely defined, formal structure is created, and participants "are willing to cede a degree of their autonomy to that joint structure" (p. 120). Finally, "when the structure is formalized to the point that the original organizations are willing to give up their identities as organizations, at least regarding the specific domain(s) in which the cooperation has occurred, they may decide to merge, to ... form a new formal organization" (p. 120).

Although Davidson's model provides a concise hierarchical description of collaboration, the model was not used in this thesis because it was not derived from a review of collaboration research, but is illustrated by a single case study only.

Nathan and Mitroff (1991) also describe interorganizational relationships in hierarchical terms, but instead of describing the process of collaboration, their model
describes the settings in which collaborative relationships occur. The authors' model is derived from negotiated order theory, which explains how organizations negotiate their interactions with each other. Using a single organization as the focal point of analysis, the authors describe a multilayered domain in which a given organization is embedded. Immediately surrounding the organization is the organization set, which is composed of organizations that have "direct, ongoingly task-related links to the focal organization" (p. 165). The next level, which overlaps only partially with the organization set, is the action set, which consists of organizations that "convene on a temporary basis to solve a shared problem" (p. 165). The action set is embedded in the network, which consists of "links both potential and actual, and both direct and indirect, among sets of organizations" (p. 165). The next level, which the authors call the industry, contains "groups of organizations that share similar functional objectives" (p. 165). Finally, all of these previously defined levels are embedded in the interorganizational field (IO field), that "encompasses organizations involved in a particular problem from all of these levels, including the news media and various government offices, among others" (p. 165).

By providing a map of where organizations exist in relation to each other, the Nathan & Mitroff model offers an important and unique perspective for human service collaborators. This perspective may be particularly helpful as organizations survey, select, and prioritize relationships with partners and perspective partners in their respective areas of service. For the purposes of this study however, no data were gathered that could be analyzed using this topographical perspective.
Mattessich and Monsey (1992) reviewed 18 studies of interagency relationships and performed an extensive analysis on collaboration. Mattesich and Monsey are among numerous authors that have identified a host of factors contributing to successful collaborations (Means, Harrison, Jeffers, & Smith, 1991; Melaville & Blank, 1992; Melaville, Blank, & Asayesh, 1993; Winer & Ray, 1996; Yank, Spradlin, & Porterfield, 1992; Selsky, 1991). Among the many contributions of the Mattessich and Monsey monograph is a classic hierarchical model that identifies three distinct levels of interagency relationships: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. Cooperation is characterized by informal relationships between organizations that exist without any defined structure or mission. Coordination exists when relationships between organizations involve mutual planning, division of responsibilities, and establishment of communication channels. The authors use the term collaboration to describe the creation of a new, shared structure by previously separate organizations. The new structure has a well-defined mission, involves comprehensive planning, and is backed by a full commitment of resources from participating organizations.

The Mattessich and Monsey monograph provides one of the most comprehensive descriptions of human service collaboration available from a single source. At the same time, the model is parsimonious in summarizing information from the authors' broad review of collaboration into a three-tiered model that has practical application for evaluating collaborative efforts. Therefore, the Mattessich and Monsey model has been adopted for use in this study. The Mattessich and Monsey model will serve as the foundational framework for stratifying Oregon Even Start collaborative efforts.
Collaboration in Human Services

Although the focus of this thesis is on partnerships between human service providers, the concepts and practice of collaboration are applicable to any field where organizations attempt to work together. Collaboration literature reflects this diversity, coming from many disciplines. In the field of human services, authors tend to discuss collaboration in practical terms, providing useful guidance for an audience of practitioners. Much of this guidance falls comfortably under two headings: (a) purposes and benefits of collaboration, and (b) key factors in successful collaboration.

Purposes and Benefits of Human Service Collaboration

Human service organizations collaborate for many reasons. Partnerships may arise naturally from symbiotic interests, they may result from the efforts of concerned local persons or groups, or they may be mandated by funding organizations and policy makers. In many human service partnerships, the purposes may not be explicitly stated by participants, while in others, partnership goals and purposes are stated in formal, thoroughly documented agreements. The purposes of one partnership may vary greatly from another, but several purposes are commonly mentioned by human service authors. After reviewing literature on the subject, Chavis (1995) identified ten primary benefits of what he termed "community coalitions." According to Chavis, community coalitions can:

1. Broaden the mission of member organizations and develop more comprehensive strategies;
2. Develop wider public support for issues;
3. Increase the influence of individual community institutions over community policies and practices;
4. Minimize duplication of services;
5. Develop more financial and human resources;
6. Increase participation from diverse sectors and constituencies;
7. Exploit new resources in a changing environment;
8. Increase accountability;
9. Improve capacity to plan and evaluate; and
10. Strengthen local organizations and institutions to respond better to the needs and aspirations of their constituents. (p. 236)

In addition to these functions of collaboration, other benefits described in human service literature include creating a unified, consumer-friendly service system (Peck, Sheinberg, & Akamatsu, 1995; Quinn & Cumblad, 1994; Kimmich, 1995; Abbott, Jordan, & Murtaza, 1995), making more efficient use of scarce resources (Pandiani & Maynard, 1993; Rogers, Anthony, & Danley, 1989; Carrillo, & De La Cancela, 1992), and improving effectiveness of services (Borgeson & Cusick, 1994; Abbott, Jordan, & Murtaza, 1995). Finally, the ultimate reason some human service organizations collaborate is to ensure their own survival (Mordock, 1990).

Key Factors in Human Service Collaboration

Many variables contribute to the success of human service collaborative relationships, and the relative influence of each varies from one relationship to another. However, seven factors emerge consistently in human service literature as critical components for successful collaboration: (a) a supportive political landscape, (b) compatibility of partners, (c) relationships of trust and understanding, (d) the availability of resources for collaboration, (e) appropriate structural development, (f) effective communication, and (g) commitment.

Political landscape. Human service collaborative efforts take place amidst a backdrop of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that make interagency relationships
possible and at the same time highly complex, sometimes unstable, and always political (Daka-Mulwanda, Thornburg, & Klein, 1995; Szanton, 1995). Beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions among collaboration participants and stakeholders form the collective equation that determines not only how much collaboration occurs, but also whether such efforts live or die (Macallan & Narayan, 1994). The landscape of community politics is also embedded within powerful and constantly changing regional, state, and national contexts (Roberts & Bradley, 1991; Means, Harrison, Jeffers, & Smith, 1991; Alaszewski & Harrison, 1988; Lynch, Jackson, Mendoza, & English, 1991; Sabatino, 1992). The success of collaborative efforts can be both a result of and beholden to these micro and macropolitical environments.

Compatibility. Like individuals, every human service organization is unique. Each organization has its own background, values, policies, mandates, and expectations. Individuals within organizations have different personalities, work styles, and ways of relating. When organizations begin to work together, differences at the individual and organizational levels inevitably surface. While some differences have little or no effects on collaborative efforts, others can severely hamper or even destroy partnerships (Bennett & Lawson, 1994; Hord, 1986; Fargason, Barnes, Schneider, & Galloway, 1994). Compatibility also extends to the geographic location of each organization (Taylor, Brooks, Phandis, & Rossmo, 1991) and the characteristics of populations that they serve (Mordock, 1990). Collaboration tends to be more difficult when organizations are located far from one another and are serving dissimilar populations.
**Relationship environment.** Although it is easy to think of organizations in terms of buildings and budgets, the vital core of interagency partnerships consists of interpersonal relationships (Selsky, 1991). The success of collaborative efforts often hinges on whether partners establish and maintain relationships of trust, mutual respect, and understanding (McDonald, Boyd, Clark, & Stewart, 1995; Means, Harrison, Jeffers, & Smith, 1991; De Bevoise, 1986; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Richards, Bailey, Brinkman, & Manoogian-O'Dell, 1996).

**Resources for collaboration.** Collaboration attempts sometimes fail because some or all participants simply do not have the means to collaborate. Partners may have difficulty understanding how to collaborate, may lack necessary collaboration skills, or have limited access to necessary resources (e.g. time, money, equipment, personnel) for implementing and maintaining the partnership (Katz, Geckle, Goldstein, & Eichenmuller, 1990; Gitlin, Lyons, & Kolodner, 1994; Yank, Spradlin, & Porterfield, 1992). One key resource mentioned in human service literature is the availability of persons with the necessary relationship and professional skills to successfully convene and lead collaborative groups (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1996; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Hord (1986) suggested that people with the personality, energy, and skills for reaching out to others should be given key roles in interagency collaboration. The independent, proactive activities of such persons are often important factors in successful collaboration.

**Appropriate structural development.** Structural development involves interagency efforts to identify partners, establish or modify goals, plan activities, assign roles, institute guidelines, and set procedures for a given collaboration.
Decisions about structure for interorganizational relationships are crucial to the success of collaboration because they define the nature of each relationship and provide guidance and expectations for collaborative behaviors that follow (Iles & Auluck, 1990; Melaville & Blank, 1992; Melaville, Blank, & Asayesh, 1993).

Structural development is usually associated with formal collaboration, but a considerable number of interagency partnerships are informal arrangements, with little recognizable structure. Nevertheless, many of the same kinds of structure decisions made in formal partnerships (e.g. setting goals, defining relationships, establishing procedures, etc.) can be critical to the success of informal relationships. Both formal and informal partnerships usually involve organizational resource allocations of some kind (e.g. time, money, etc.), and therefore can benefit from periodic internal review. Whereas in formal collaboration structural development is a process shared by multiple organizations, ownership of decisions regarding informal relationships is usually internal to each organization.

Effective communication. Quality of communication both between and within participating organizations is frequently identified in human service literature as an essential ingredient for successful collaboration (Butterfoss, Goodman & Wandersman, 1993; Harrison, Lynch, Rosander, & Borton, 1990; Coe, 1988). Agencies must communicate to have any form of partnership, and partners in structured collaborations must communicate from the very beginning to establish shared purposes, goals, roles, procedures, and policies. They must continue communicating successfully to implement their agreements. Communication may be limited to top level administrators, frontline staff, or may involve multilayered
coordination within organizations (Peck, Sheinberg, & Akamatsu, 1995; Richards, Bailey, Brinkman, & Manoogian-O'Dell, 1996). Collaboration attempts sometimes falter in spite of well-laid plans simply because partners failed to communicate at necessary levels or neglected to disseminate information to all participants in a timely manner (Katz, Geckle, Goldstein, & Eichenmuller, 1990).

Commitment. Collaboration does not exist without commitment. In an era of chronic reductions in social service expenditures, acquiring and maintaining organizational resources can be a constant, competitive battle. Administrators and frontline staff alike are often overburdened with existing tasks and priorities stemming from their own agency agendas (Selsky, 1991). Collaborative arrangements may never get off the ground because potential partners are simply otherwise occupied, or initially successful efforts may later falter as other priorities draw away vital attention and resources (Peck, Sheinberg, & Akamatsu, 1995). One or more partners or potential partners may simply decide that the benefits of a given interagency partnership are not worth the costs (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). In circumstances such as these, successful collaboration may result more from the sheer determination and perseverance of participants than from any other factor.

Summary

In recent years interorganizational collaboration has increasingly been emphasized as an important step for addressing inefficiencies in the delivery of human services. Among the many benefits of collaboration described by human service authors are the creation of a more consumer-friendly service system, more efficient use of available resources, and avoiding service duplication. Seven key factors emerge
consistently in human service literature as critical components of successful collaboration: (a) a supportive political landscape, (b) compatibility of partners, (c) relationships of trust and understanding, (d) the availability of resources for collaboration, (e) appropriate structural development, (f) effective communication, and (g) commitment.

It is also apparent in human service literature that although the idea of collaboration has become quite popular, the absence of the seven key factors described above has limited the actual practice of collaboration. This is apparently true in the family literacy field also, where the mandate to collaborate has often preceded the arrival of key factors necessary for successful interagency partnerships.

**Family Literacy, Even Start, and Collaboration**

It is widely recognized that education is associated with economic security, and that lack of education, and particularly illiteracy, is associated with poverty. Millions of dollars are spent every year in United States to teach America's children how to read, yet these efforts often fail to engage the most important educators of all, parents. Parents are arguably the most important teachers that children will ever have, yet they themselves must be educated before they can help their children, and they must be able to use that education to support their child's learning. Recognizing the vital educational link between parents and children, the family literacy model integrates adult education, early childhood education, parent education, and parent and child time together to improve literacy levels of all family members (Bailey, 1996).
The family literacy movement in the United States has grown steadily over the last two decades, resulting in over 1,000 family literacy programs, numerous academic articles and research studies, and a rising profile in mainstream media (Auerbach, 1995). Growing awareness of the importance of family literacy led to the establishment of Even Start, a federally funded program created for families most in need of family literacy services.

The Even Start Family Literacy Program began in 1988 when the United States Congress passed Public Law 100-297. The law authorized the Even Start program to improve family literacy, promote parents as their children's first teachers, and enhance the economic conditions of disadvantaged families (Federal Register, 1994). The Even Start program has four primary components: (a) adult basic education/English as a second language (ABE/ESL), (b) parenting education and support (PES), (c) early childhood education (ECE), and, (d) parent and child time together (PACT).

The federal Even Start legislation required that all Even Start programs collaborate with social service providers in their local communities to improve the overall service environment for families and, where possible, avoid duplication of services. Though collaboration is federally mandated for Even Start programs, it is increasingly being acknowledged by practitioners themselves as a critical task for family literacy programs. Alamprese (1996) cited two reasons for this growing recognition of the importance of collaboration: (a) the process of meeting the complex needs of parents and children frequently requires the delivery of multiple services, and (b) the trend toward reductions in funding for social services has prompted the
exchange of services and materials between programs to support comprehensive interventions.

In spite of the growing recognition of the importance of collaboration among family literacy programs, Oregon Even Start programs had received little guidance for implementing interagency partnerships at the time data were collected for this study. Therefore, focus groups conducted with Even Start partners became part evaluation and part exploration. Evaluators and practitioners alike were attempting to discover what collaboration meant and should mean for Oregon Even Start and its partners.

The Choice of Focus Groups

Focus groups are group interviews normally led by a moderator who guides discussion among participants to gather data on specified topics of interest (Morgan, 1998). Transcripts of focus group discussions usually serve as the primary data source for analysis, although important additional information can often be gained from observing nonverbal behavior during group discussions (e.g. tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and other body language). One of the earliest uses of focus groups described in academic literature were group interviews conducted at the beginning of World War II to assess the effectiveness of radio programs designed to boost Army morale (Berg, 1995). Although focus groups have long been used as a research tool in marketing and public relations, they were rarely used in social science research until the past decade. During the past several years, however, focus groups have become a popular research method for government agencies, nonprofit
organizations, and academic researchers (Morgan, 1998; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sunagub, 1996).

Several characteristics of focus groups made this approach the preferred method for data collection on Oregon Even Start collaboration. First, because of limited funding and long distances between Oregon Even Start programs, it was not feasible to conduct individual interviews with each service provider identified as an Even Start collaborator. Focus groups are well-suited to such a circumstance because data can be gathered from multiple participants in a single setting.

Second, although Even Start legislation mandated that local programs collaborate with other service providers in their communities, no specific guidelines or expectations for collaboration were provided. Therefore, Even Start evaluators had very little criteria for constructing a formal, quantitative analysis of collaboration efforts. Focus groups are ideal research tools for exploration and discovery, where few if any reliable and valid measures are available or even possible (Morgan, 1998; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sunagub, 1996).

Finally, focus group settings require that participants work together to accomplish a specified goal, exploring their differences and similarities on identified topics (Morgan, 1998). By bringing Oregon Even Start partners together to reflect on collaborative efforts, the focus groups provided important opportunities for Oregon Even Start partners to learn about and practice collaborating with each other. At times, discussion in the focus groups turned from talking about collaboration to serious partnership planning.
Chapter Summary

Over the past several years, both the concept and practice of collaboration have grown in popularity in many fields, including human services. In spite of this popularity, collaboration remains a substantial challenge, especially when multiple organizations are involved. Many definitions of collaboration exist, and the term is often used interchangeably with other terms that have similar meanings. Therefore, to avoid confusion, the commonly held meaning for the term collaboration will be used in this thesis, referring generally to organizations that "labor together" in some manner.

Numerous authors have discussed collaboration issues and experiences in detail, but relatively few have attempted to model the entire process of collaboration. Models of collaboration usually describe interorganizational relationships in terms of continua, phases, and levels. The Mattesich and Monsey model has been adopted for this analysis because it effectively integrates information from a broad review of collaboration into a practical three-tiered model.

Federal legislation required that all Even Start programs collaborate with local service providers (Federal Register, 1994), but few guidelines for collaboration were provided. As part of a statewide evaluation of Oregon Even Start programs, focus groups were conducted to explore and evaluate the progress of collaborative efforts between Oregon Even Start programs and local human service providers. This study will involve an analysis of the Even Start focus group data, using Mattessich and Monsey's hierarchy as a guide, to determine the approximate level of collaboration that existed at the time in each of the six Even Start communities. Results of this
analysis should illuminate collaboration concepts while providing important insights into the practice of collaboration among Oregon Even Start programs and their partners.
CHAPTER 3

Methods and Procedures

During the Spring and Summer of 1996, six focus groups were conducted with Even Start collaborators from communities across the state of Oregon. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather information from organizations that had been collaborating with Even Start programs in providing services to their local communities. During the previous year, meetings had been held with staff from Even Start programs to gather data on collaborative efforts. The 1996 meetings were conducted to assess collaborative efforts from the perspective of Even Start partners themselves, therefore Even Start staff members did not participate in the focus groups.

Even Start administrators provided a list of local community partners to whom letters of invitation were sent. An average of 3-4 persons attended each focus group representing their respective agencies. Typical agencies represented at the focus groups included Head Start, the Oregon Department of Adult and Family Services (AFS), local community college Adult Basic Education programs, and other programs serving young parents struggling with educational and vocational challenges.

To preserve confidentiality in this thesis, fictitious names are used to refer to specific Even Start programs. Even Start programs are typically operated by small numbers of personnel, making it easy to identify specific persons when the program is known. Names of focus group participants and their respective agencies are also withheld.
Focus Group Setting

Focus groups were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere in settings at or near local Even Start facilities. With consent of participants, all meetings were tape-recorded and notes were taken. After participants introduced themselves, members of the group worked together to produce a list of local Even Start community partners, including agencies not represented at the focus groups. Members of each focus group identified as many Even Start collaborators as they could recall, and collaborative activities of these organizations were grouped into eleven categories. The primary purpose of this activity was to provide a rough map of the number and variety of agencies providing support services for Even Start families.

While producing the list of Even Start partners, focus group participants discussed both their own agency's collaboration with Even Start and that of other agencies in their communities who were not represented at the meetings. Participants were able to discuss the efforts of agencies not represented because most Even Start programs were located in relatively small communities, where staff from different providers often have personal relationships with each other and are aware of families being served and the type of services being provided.

Data from the lists produced in each focus group are summarized in Tables 1-3 below. Each table indicates the number of collaborating organizations that assist Even Start programs in each category. These data do not represent a comprehensive list of Even Start collaborators and services. Instead, they provide a view of collaborator perceptions of the collaboration as gathered during the focus groups. Though six of the
seven Even Start programs are included in this sample, some numbers are larger than six due to local collaborations with more than one program in each category.

Table 1 shows collaborative efforts that do not involve direct provision of instruction or material assistance to families. The table indicates collaborating organizations that assist Even Start by referring families to the Even Start program, referring Even Start families to other services, coordinating varied service efforts for families, or providing administrative assistance to the Even Start program (e.g. office space, secretarial labor).

Table 1. Referral, Coordination, and Administrative Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral, Coordination, &amp; Administrative Services</th>
<th>Referrals to Even Start</th>
<th>Resource &amp; Referral</th>
<th>Coordinate Resources</th>
<th>Administrative Support</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABE/ESL Programs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD/School Districts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Mental Health</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing/Energy Assistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Department</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource/Referral Agencies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Service Providers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Agencies</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 includes collaborative efforts that involve direct instruction to adults enrolled in Even Start programs. Adult Basic Education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL), and any other form of specialized instruction appear in this chart.
### Table 2. Adult Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Instruction</th>
<th>ABE/ESL Instruction</th>
<th>Specialized Instruction</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABE/ESL Program</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD/School Districts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Mental Health Agencies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing/Energy Assist Programs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource/Referral Agencies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Department</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Service Providers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Collaborating Agencies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 includes collaborative efforts that assist Even Start families with basic needs. This table includes collaborators that provide Even Start families with early childhood services or child care, energy or housing assistance, transportation services, health or mental health care, or any form of material assistance (e.g. food, clothing, money).

### Table 3. Instrumental Assistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental Assistance</th>
<th>Energy/Housing</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Material Assistance</th>
<th>Early Childhood/Child Care</th>
<th>Health/Mental Health</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABE/ESL Programs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD/School Districts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Mental Health Agencies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing/Energy Assist Programs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource/Referral Agencies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Department</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Service Providers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Collaborating Agencies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from the tables above, a wide variety of agencies were providing support services for Even Start programs and families, and the types of services being provided were quite diverse. Head Start and the Oregon Department of Adult and Family Services (AFS) appeared to be two of the most important contributors to Even Start programs and families, together providing a total of 96 services in the six communities where focus groups were held. While these figures must be considered rough estimates because they are based upon the recollections of a limited number of focus group participants, they clearly show that relationships with other agencies are vital to the success of Even Start programs and the families they serve.

**Focus Group Questions**

After focus group participants completed lists of Even Start community partners, six specific questions about the collaboration were discussed. Responses to these questions were the primary data for this thesis:

1. What unique services does Even Start provide your community?
2. How has the Even Start program helped you to understand what Even Start is all about?
3. What successes have resulted from the collaboration with Even Start?
4. What challenges have arisen in the collaboration?
5. How has the collaboration worked for families in your community?
6. What recommendations do you have for improving or facilitating interagency collaborations?
Data Analysis Strategies

With consent of all participants, audio tapes of each of the six focus groups were recorded, and written transcripts were produced. Analysis of the tapes and transcripts was performed using standard coding procedures described by Berg (1998), Lofland and Lofland (1995), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Transcripts and tapes of each focus group were reviewed in their entirety to select comments from participants that could potentially provide evidence on the level of local collaboration. Each selected comment was analyzed to test its fit with the various levels of the Mattesich and Monsey model. In addition, all comments were compared with others from the same focus group and across focus groups. Finally, the pattern of responses to specific moderator questions was contrasted across groups. These analyses revealed significant patterns in the data and clear differences between groups.

Although data gathered from these focus groups provides valuable information about Even Start collaboration, it is important to note the possibility of some bias in the sample of focus group participants, because random selection was not possible. Even Start administrators themselves provided a list of collaborators, and only a portion of those invited actually attended focus groups. In spite of these limitations, the data provide a valuable window into the nature of interagency relationships among Oregon Even Start programs and their partners.
CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of the focus groups was quite broad: to gather general information about the successes of and barriers to local Even Start collaborative efforts. The data were used as part of an evaluation of Even Start programs prepared for the State of Oregon Office of Community College Services. I first listened to the tapes of the focus groups to get an overall sense of what was said. I took rough notes of issues that arose in the groups. I listened to some parts of the tapes a second time to further clarify some collaborator statements and exchanges. As a participant on an evaluation team, I was asked to prepare a report on the collaboration focus groups to be included in a larger evaluation of Oregon Even Start programs. Therefore, following transcription of the tapes, my initial review focused on themes that might be immediately useful to Oregon policymakers and Even Start administrators. Although I was able to identify several simple collaboration themes in the transcripts for the State report, my scrutiny of the data led me to wonder if some Even Start programs were really collaborating at all. Participants at different focus groups seemed to talk about collaboration so differently that I wondered if they were talking about the same subject. What did these interagency partners think collaboration was? What was collaboration supposed to look like? What did collaboration look like when agencies were not collaborating appropriately?
When I first began scrutinizing the focus group data through the lens of the Mattessich and Monsey (1992) model, I was attempting to determine the overall level of collaboration among Oregon Even Start programs and their partners. Quickly, however, I discovered that no such level existed. Instead, the focus group data revealed that Oregon Even Start programs differ significantly in the level of their collaborative efforts. Moreover, there was remarkable within-program consistency in overall level of collaboration. With few exceptions, agencies within each community tended to collaborate at a consistent level with their local Even Start program.

Identification

After reviewing focus group transcripts numerous times, I remained frustrated because half of the six Even Start groups didn’t seem to fit comfortably anywhere in the Mattessich and Monsey model. The lowest level of the model, cooperation, assumes that relationships have developed between organizations and that information is shared as needed. However, in several focus groups, it appeared that participants were barely aware of what other organizations were doing at all, as illustrated in this exchange at the Jefferson group:

Moderator: How do you think that Even Start has worked for the families that it serves?

Collaborator: I don't have a clue. I probably wouldn't know necessarily. [Even Start person] keeps me up to date in terms of success stories and things like that. I don't know that, I know that one time we talked about promoting the success stories more, but I'm not really sure that we have a way of always letting that be known.
Note the contradiction in the above statement. The collaborator’s initial response was “don’t have a clue,” but he then followed by saying that Even Start keeps him “up to date.” Of course, if he was kept up to date with any degree of consistency, he would have a clue about how Even Start has worked for families that it serves.

One way of inferring frequency of contact between agencies is to examine the language used in describing interagency relationships. Frequency of interagency contact may be measured in hours, days, or weeks, but one collaborator from Madison seemed to assess her frequency of contact with the Even Start program in years:

Somehow I feel like this year my connection with [Even Start person] hasn’t been that great...it’s very easy to lose track of each other and programs are changing constantly or families are changing...

Speaking of a monthly interagency meeting that had been held at one time, the same collaborator said:

...people just came and kind of shared what they were doing in the programs ... and this last year I lost track of that. I’m not sure if ... somebody from Even Start went, but I just stopped going.

A collaborator from Franklin summarized his agency’s interagency relationship with Even Start rather concisely in this exchange:

Moderator: So would you say that there are any other challenges...? Anything else that’s come up for you?

Collaborator: Not at this particular point in time. I think because it’s on such a basic level, once you really start collaborating I think you really get involved. Then you start running into everybody’s schedule...

In the foregoing example, the focus group participant indicates that as far as his agency was concerned, collaboration with Even Start was at such a “basic level” that there was
little or no scheduling involved. Moreover, by saying “once you really start
collaborating,” he implied that in his mind, real collaboration had not yet occurred.

Though his agency’s relationship with the Franklin Even Start program was
fairly minimal, the same collaborator was glad to have Even Start as a place to refer
clients:

...kids just sit going bonkers, not doing anything because we weren't
reaching them, immature students. Along comes the Even Start program,
the ABE instructors are saying, "Get 'em over there, get 'em over there!"
They need the parenting skills...They need the basic life skills. So now
we've got a group of clients now being reached ...

There are many more examples typifying this minimal level of interagency relationship,
and almost without exception they come from the Jefferson, Madison, and Franklin
focus groups. Moreover, not one clear example of relationships higher than this
occurred in any of these three groups. Yet in spite of the rather remote relationships that
were evident in these three communities, agencies still considered themselves Even
Start partners, as evidenced by their attendance at the focus groups.

Interagency partnerships at this minimal level do not fit very well in the existing
Mattessich and Monsey model, but are probably more accurately located below the
lowest level in the model, cooperation. In order to adequately account for these low-
level relationships, I propose that a new level be added to the Mattessich and Monsey
model, identification. At the identification level of interagency relationships, programs
have identified each other as partners or potential partners and have gained a basic
knowledge of the services the other provides. However, interagency contact is minimal
or does not occur at all for extended periods of time, perhaps months or years. Program
administrators or staff from different agencies may occasionally discuss program issues,
but only if they happen to come into contact with each other for some other purpose.

Because contact between programs is so infrequent at the identification level, administrators and staff tend to have limited knowledge about each other's operations and clients. Three of the six Even Start programs in this study were collaborating at the identification level.

Cooperation

Cooperation is the next in the ascending levels of interagency relationship specified in this report, but it is the lowest level in the Mattessich and Monsey (1992) model. They describe cooperation as:

informal relationships that exist without any commonly defined mission, structure or planning effort. Information is shared as needed, and authority is retained by each organization so there is virtually no risk. Resources are separate as are rewards. (p. 39)

In this paper, cooperation is distinguished from the previous level, identification, by the existence of relationships, which though informal, are bilateral, consistent, and exercise noticeable influence on the operations of involved programs. At this level, programs can be described as “co-operating” or “working together.”

Interesting in the Oregon Even Start data is that no Even Start collaboration was predominantly at the cooperation level. Some collaborative efforts that were probably at this level last year had moved relatively quickly to higher levels. One such program is in Adams County, where a collaborator commented:

I can put communication on both sides...’cause it took a while for us to learn how to communicate and then once we learned it's been a great success. And that's just learning each other's language and what our priorities are and what our differences are.
The foregoing comment seemed to characterize both Adams and Washington collaborative efforts, where collaborators reported lower levels of interagency relationships in early collaboration efforts with Even Start, but had now achieved considerable success. In spite of these early difficulties, the fact that these Even Start programs and their collaborators were attempting early on to communicate consistently with each other indicates that their interagency relationships were at or above the cooperation level.

Data from the Hamilton program indicated a relatively high level of collaboration with partners who were co-located, but relationships with partners who visited the Even Start facility from other locations seemed to remain at the cooperation level. A collaborator providing nutrition education said her collaboration with Even Start was more primitive than that of others in the group:

I think for me maybe the things that have been challenging are maybe a little more basic. It's just been difficult sometimes to reach [Even Start staff]. Being out of the building and sometimes there's quite a bit of phone tag...trying to reach each other.

The statement above occurred in the context of a discussion about incompatibilities in agency missions and policies, which Mattessich and Monsey (1992) indicate begins to occur at the next level of interagency relationships, coordination. By saying that her interagency relationship challenges were "more basic," she effectively delimited her collaboration with Even Start to the level of cooperation in the Mattessich and Monsey model.
Coordination

At the next level of interagency relationships, coordination, collaborative efforts become more formal and more influential in day-to-day agency operations. Regular collaboration meetings are held, program plans may be modified in the context of interagency discussions, and partners work together to solve problems for individual clients or in the collaboration itself. Mattessich and Monsey (1992) describe coordination as:

characterized by more formal relationships and understanding of compatible missions. Some planning and division of roles are required, and communication channels are established. Authority still rests with the individual organizations, but there is some increased risk to all participants. (p. 39)

Interagency efforts at Washington, Adams, and Hamilton were characteristic of this level of collaboration.

A focus group participant in Washington reported that in addition to talking to Even Start staff about specific family issues, regular meetings were held to improve collaboration efforts:

when I was doing prep and I had a concern about a family... I would call [Even Start person]...and she would talk about what the program offers to different families ... and then we have monthly meetings and they're at different times so that different staff that are involved with Even Start families can come...

Another comment from the Washington focus group made it clear that, at least in some cases, their local collaboration has gone beyond simple information sharing to collective decision making:

Moderator: What do you think have been challenges and the successes in the collaboration of ES from your perspective?
Collaborator: I guess in the past year it's been the parenting classes. The challenge was getting people together, the agencies together to agree on the same task.

In Adams County, a focus group participant described how Even Start and its collaborators are sharing in the program planning process:

We've done a lot of problem solving [with AFS] so that the self-sufficiency plans would reflect what the Even Start activities were and vice versa, and that type of thing, so I think in that way we've learned a lot about each other...

The Hamilton Even Start program and its key partners seemed to have taken coordination to higher levels than other Even Start programs, though their efforts could not be characterized as occurring at the highest level described in the Mattessich and Monsey (1992) model. Both the Hamilton and Jefferson Even Start programs are collocated with key collaborators, a factor noted for enhancing collaboration efforts (Gray, 1985). However, only the Hamilton Even Start program has apparently exploited its colocation to develop a highly integrated service environment for its families. A collaborator at the Hamilton focus group described one of the successes resulting from their interagency efforts:

...through the help of Even Start staff, I have been able to establish a rapport with all of the students ... whether they're planning to participate immediately in work experience or not. It's kind of important because it is an individual thing ... I think it's important that they know that this may be a type of training that will be available to them in the future ... With the help of [Even Start staff] who have spent time with me talking to the students ... we've sat down and done employment development plans with each student individually ... I felt that it was very important that [an Even Start person] usually started things off by saying, well, what would you like to do?

The type of service described in the foregoing example was unique among all Oregon Even Start collaborative efforts, and though it is discussed here at the level of
coordination, a key element of Hamilton collaborative efforts is not described in the Mattessich and Monsey (1992) model. A common theme in collaboration literature (Peck et al., 1995) is the problem of moving beyond administrative level relationships to involving frontline staff in collaborative efforts. The Hamilton Even Start program and its key partners have apparently moved even beyond staff level collaboration to the level of clients themselves. In the Mattessich and Monsey (1992) review of 18 collaboration studies, two of the most potent factors found in successful interagency efforts were open, frequent communication, and development of understanding, trusting relationships. Hamilton Even Start families were apparently able to communicate easily with and develop relationships of trust with key partners and potential partners in their own empowerment process, thus becoming full partakers of the benefits of interagency collaboration. Though the collaborative efforts described in the Hamilton area are not structurally characteristic of the highest level of collaboration described in the Mattessich and Monsey monograph, they certainly go a long way toward construction of the united, consumer-friendly service system described by numerous collaboration authors.

Collaboration

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) reserve the term collaboration for the highest level of their model of interagency relationships. According to the authors, at the collaboration level, agencies:

- bring previously separated organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well defined communication channels operating on many levels. Authority is determined by the collaborative
structure. Risk is much greater because each member of the collaboration contributes its own resources and reputation. Resources are pooled or jointly secured, and the products are shared. (p. 39)

No Even Start programs were collaborating at this highest level, nor is this level of collaboration very realistic at the present time. It would be extremely difficult for Even Start programs to collaborate at this highest level, for several reasons. First, the federal legislation that funds the Even Start program describes it as a separate program, not a conglomerate of existing programs. Second, full-scale collaboration is never the work of one agency, nor even two agencies. At its highest level, interagency collaboration is the result of the collective efforts of numerous agencies, supportive administrators, and policymakers (Winer & Ray, 1996). Being a tiny fish in a massive ocean of service providers hardly puts Even Start in position to overhaul a 50+ year-old tradition of fragmented social service delivery (Gardner, 1989). Finally, Even Start programs are not provided with anywhere near the authority and resources necessary to bring about mergence of the kind described in the highest level of the Mattessich and Monsey (1992) model. In many cases Even Start administrators and staff do not even know if they will have a job the following year.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The following research questions were addressed in this thesis:

1. On what level of the Mattesich and Monsey model were collaborative efforts in each of the Even Start communities?

2. How useful is the Mattesich and Monsey model for explaining Oregon Even Start collaborative efforts and interorganizational collaboration in general?

Research Question #1

On what level of the Mattesich and Monsey model were collaborative efforts in each of the Even Start communities?

Interagency relationships in three of six Oregon Even Start communities, Adams, Washington, and Hamilton, were found to be at the coordination level of the Mattesich and Monsey model. Participants in the Washington, Adams, and Hamilton communities described more formal interagency relationships than were apparent in the other Even Start communities. In the Washington, Adams, and Hamilton communities, communication seemed to be consistent and collaborators were considerably more knowledgeable about Even Start operations and clients. Mutual planning, division of roles, and program adaptation were also apparent. All of these attributes are characteristic of the second level of the Mattesich and Monsey model, coordination.

Partnerships in the other three Even Start communities, Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison, were at such a low level that they did not qualify for even the lowest
level of the Mattesich and Monsey model. Instead of “informal relationships” where “information is shared as needed,” as described in the lowest level of the Mattesich and Monsey model, participants at the Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison focus groups made statements such as “I don’t have a clue” and “it’s very easy to lose track of each other,” to describe the obviously distant relationship they had with their local Even Start program. Interagency partnerships at such a minimal level might be characterized as occurring at an identification level, where programs have identified each other as partners or potential partners, but little collaborative contact actually takes place. Because contact between programs is at such a minimal level program, staff and administrators are likely to have limited knowledge of each other's ongoing operations and clients. Nevertheless, they may still consider themselves to be collaborating.

Having determined that no Oregon Even Start programs were collaborating above moderate levels on the Mattesich and Monsey model, it might be tempting to criticize Even Start programs for not making a more determined effort to collaborate at the highest level. But such a criticism assumes, first of all, that collaborating at the highest levels would lead to the best results for Even Start families, an assumption that has yet to be supported. Further, even if collaboration at the highest level of Mattesich and Monsey’s model did lead to better outcomes for Even Start families, it is doubtful that such high-level collaboration could be initiated and maintained principally through the efforts of even the most committed Even Start program. Like the vast majority of agencies with which Even Start may partner, Even Start was created as a distinct entity with a targeted funding stream to achieve a unique set of goals (Federal Register, 1994; Szanton, 1995). Therefore, the very manner of Even Start's creation
lends itself to separation, not conglomeration in the manner described at the highest
level of the Mattesich and Monsey model. Overcoming this natural separation between
agencies requires a consistent and substantial commitment of program resources,
which Even Start programs have never had. Like most social service programs, Even
Start operates on limited budgets that may be discontinued at the end of each funding
cycle. During the past three years, for example, three Oregon Even Start programs
have been discontinued.

Notwithstanding the many obstacles to Even Start collaboration, the results of
this thesis show that three of six Oregon Even Start programs were consistently
coordinating their efforts with key partners in their communities. In each of these three
communities, not only was there substantial commitment from Even Start to
collaboration, but Even Start partners had decided that collaboration with Even Start
would yield results that were worth the costs.

Within-Program Consistency

One surprising finding from the focus groups was the within-program
consistency of collaboration. With the exception of Hamilton, collaborators who
attended each focus group seemed to be collaborating at very similar levels with their
local Even Start program. There are several possible reasons for this finding. First,
because Oregon Even Start programs are often operated as a subset of a larger
organization, such as a local community college, it is possible that organizations that
run Even Start have guidelines for collaborating with other agencies. Guidelines for
interagency collaboration could have a leveling effect over otherwise dissimilar relationships.

Second, collaboration with Even Start may exist primarily through the efforts of a key Even Start staff member who naturally reaches out in a similar manner to all local partners. The importance of key personalities has been documented in collaboration literature (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1996; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Hord, 1986) and was supported in our focus group data by several comments referring to the importance of specific Even Start staff members. Comments from the Adams focus group illustrate the difference one Even Start staff member was making for the collaboration:

[Even Start staff member] is very good at sharing information ... Where she has all the time to clip all the articles and read them herself I'll never know ... I know all about learning styles because [Even Start staff member] has tried them all out on us.

Finally, the apparent within-program consistency of collaboration may be an artifact of data collection. Though the use of focus groups offers many advantages, one disadvantage of focus groups is the tendency for groups to seek agreement on topics of discussion. This may have led to a homogenization of comments about collaboration with Even Start. It is also possible that consistency resulted from the fact that Even Start administrators provided a list of collaborators. While this list may have been an exhaustive list of Even Start collaborators at some sites, in others, lists provided by Even Start administrators may have excluded programs collaborating at lower levels. Low-level collaborators may also have been more likely to exclude themselves from data collection by not attending the focus groups, an occurrence commonly known as self-selection (Humphreys, 1996).
Rural Collaboration

It is interesting to note that two of the three communities where collaboration was occurring at a higher level (Washington and Adams County) were based in rural settings, whereas all three of the communities where collaboration was minimal were located in more urban settings (Franklin, Madison, and Jefferson). Two factors may have contributed to this finding. First, the sparsity of both population and programs in rural settings makes it more likely that providers will cross paths and be familiar with each other’s operations and clients. Second, it is well known that rural communities often have considerably fewer resources available than urban settings (Helge, 1989), a condition that provides powerful incentives for pooling resources and working together. The lack of resources in rural areas was vividly illustrated by a focus group participant in Washington who described community efforts to make medical and mental health services available to a remote part of their county:

There's a lot of things there today that were not there a year ago for sure! There's a doctor up there and there's going to be a dental clinic and mental health up there. We had to fly them up there or drive them up there, get them any way we could. We were on bended knees.

Research Question #2

How useful is the Mattesich and Monsey model for explaining Oregon Even Start collaborative efforts and interorganizational collaboration in general?

Because the lowest level in the Mattesich and Monsey model was too high to adequately characterize partnerships in half of the Oregon Even Start communities, the model had limited utility for this analysis. Analysis of the focus group data made it appear that interagency relationships in Franklin, Madison and Jefferson were of very
low intensity. Communication between agencies in these communities seemed to be at a very low-level, in some instances bordering on nonexistent. Interagency relationships in these communities did not seem to fit the Mattesich and Monsey model description of cooperation, where "informal relationships" exist in which "information is shared as needed." When there is little or no contact between agencies, information is not likely to be shared, whether it is needed or not, and relationships may exist more in name than in actual fact.

This analysis highlighted a disparity between the Mattesich and Monsey model and the probable reality for many human service programs. The Mattesich and Monsey model may not label minimal interagency relationships, such as those found in Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison as "collaboration," but the participants in those minimal relationships considered themselves collaborators nonetheless. The Mattesich and Monsey model does not address these minimal relationships that were the reality for half of Even Start programs in this study.

The Mattesich and Monsey model was helpful in stratifying interagency relationships in the other three Oregon Even Start communities, where partnerships had reached a higher level of collaboration. Participants in the Washington, Adams, and Hamilton communities described more formal interagency relationships, with some mutual planning and division of roles. Communication seemed to be much more consistent in these communities and collaborators were considerably more knowledgeable about Even Start operations and clients. All of these attributes are characteristic of the second level of the Mattesich and Monsey model, coordination. Therefore, although the Mattesich and Monsey model may not account very well for
relationships at the very lowest levels of intensity, it was useful for evaluating collaboration in circumstances where all partnerships are above minimal levels.

It is important to note that the Mattesich and Monsey model used in this analysis represents only a portion of the authors' larger description of interagency relationships. In addition to the hierarchical model used in this thesis, Mattesich and Monsey described 19 collaboration factors that could be used to construct a more extensive evaluation (Mattesich and Monsey, 1992). The three-tiered model used in this analysis was chosen for two reasons. First, Mattesich and Monsey utilized information from an extensive review of collaboration studies to construct the model. Second, the model was both practical and simple enough to allow a secondary analysis to be performed on data that had originally been collected for a different purpose. The data used in this study represent a small portion of data collected during a statewide evaluation of Oregon Even Start programs. One part of the statewide evaluation used focus groups to explore what services were being provided in Even Start communities and gather perspectives from Even Start partners on local collaboration efforts. Because the purpose of the focus groups was broad and exploratory, group discussions were not structured to elicit data for analysis using detailed models of collaboration.

Future evaluations of Oregon Even Start programs may build upon the framework established by these focus groups in planning more detailed analyses of community collaboration efforts. In addition to data from the focus groups, several collaboration models and concepts reviewed in the present study may serve as useful guides for designing future evaluations. Davidson's model (1976), for example, consists of five levels of collaboration, in contrast with the three levels in the
Mattesich and Monsey model. Probably more important, though, than the number of levels in each model, are the collaboration concepts associated with each level. Taken together, both the Davidson model and the Mattesich and Monsey model offer numerous constructs that could be used to design research questions for future evaluations.

While the Davidson model and the Mattesich and Monsey model measure the intensity of interagency collaboration, a comprehensive evaluation would include assessment of many additional variables. Nathan and Mitroff's description (1991) of organizational topography could be used to map the relationship settings in which Oregon Even Start programs operate. The Flynn and Harbin model (1987) describes five dimensions of collaboration (climate, resources, policies, people, and process) that could be used to construct survey and interview questions. In the same article, Flynn and Harbin provided detailed descriptions of typical stages of collaboration that could be used in a longitudinal analysis of Even Start collaboration.

In addition to the models reviewed in this study, future Even Start evaluations may measure factors associated with successful collaboration identified by Mattesich and Monsey (1992) and other authors previously cited (Means, Harrison, Jeffers, & Smith, 1991; Melaville & Blank, 1992; Melaville, Blank, & Asayesh, 1993; Winer & Ray, 1996; Yank, Spradlin, & Porterfield, 1992; Selsky, 1991). Ultimately, evaluations of Oregon Even Start may assess collaboration outcomes, particularly those related to the goals of local interagency partnerships. Numerous goals of collaboration are mentioned in human service literature, including cost reduction (Abbott, Jordan, & Murtaza, 1995), increased provider satisfaction (Carrillo, & De La
Implications for Research

Three lessons learned during the course of this study have implications for future research. First, by creating rich data sets that can be examined from multiple perspectives, qualitative methods offer unique flexibility for secondary analyses such as the present study. Second, it is likely that collaboration in specific service domains or geographic areas occurs in varied patterns, many of which may not resemble the higher levels of collaboration advocated by authors in the field. Finally, rather than simply encouraging human service organizations to collaborate with each other at the highest levels, researchers should concentrate on providing answers to basic questions about what forms of collaboration are useful in which circumstances and why.

The Utility of Qualitative Methods

This thesis would not have been possible were it not for the decision made by evaluators to employ qualitative methods for assessing Oregon Even Start collaboration. The choice of qualitative methods provided crucial flexibility for later analysis of the data. When Even Start evaluators were preparing for the focus groups,
goals for assessing collaborative efforts were quite broad and exploratory, and plans for the present study had not been conceived. No questions were directly asked in the focus groups about the intensity level of collaborative efforts, making it somewhat remarkable that stratification could be achieved at a later date using the Mattesich and Monsey (1992) model. If evaluators had used quantitative methods for data collection on Even Start collaboration, it is unlikely that later analysis from such a different perspective would have been possible.

Collaboration Patterns

Although seldom if ever explicitly discussed in the literature, the pattern of relationships between service providers can vary greatly, making organizational decisions about collaboration more complex than they might at first appear. For the purposes of this thesis, pattern is defined as the constellation of interorganizational relationships that exist in a certain geographic area or service domain. Perhaps the simplest pattern of an interorganizational relationship is a non-reciprocal, or monadic relationship, as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Example of Monadic Relationship](image)

In monadic relationships, one organization takes independent action to work with another organization, and the second organization does not reciprocate.
Nevertheless, a collaborative relationship is sustained through the efforts of the motivated organization. For example, a small organization such as Even Start may be motivated to work with a much larger, well-funded organization, such as a local community college, even though the collaboration commitment from the larger organization may be minimal or nonexistent. Though they are non-reciprocal, monadic relationships may be beneficial to both organizations to the extent that they help organizations achieve their own, independent goals.

When two organizations work together in a reciprocal matter to pursue their own independent objectives, the collaboration pattern is dyadic, as shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Example of Dyadic Relationship](image)

In theory, a dyadic relationship may exist between any two organizations. A local vocational program, for example, may have a reciprocal arrangement with a local Even Start program to refer clients to each other and coordinate training provided by the two programs.

Dyadic relationships may exist as subsets of multi-dyads, or multidyadic relationships, in which three or more organizations work together in separate, dyadic relationships to pursue their own independent objectives, as shown in Figure 3.
Multidyadic relationships consist of two or more dyadic relationships, where no central coordinating structure between organizations has formed. Using the previous example, Even Start may have a dyadic relationship with a local vocational program and a local Head Start program, and the vocational program and Head Start program may have a relationship independent of Even Start.

The highest levels of collaboration occur when two or more organizations form a new, separate organization that governs their collaboration. Figure 4 illustrates this convergent pattern.
Unlike the previously described patterns, where organizations collaborate to achieve their own independent goals, convergent relationships are no longer independently driven. They arise out of a desire by all participants to achieve a shared set of goals. Convergent patterns are likely to result when several organizations decide that rather than having separate independent relationships, as in Figure 3 above, they can serve their community better by combining their efforts and forming a new structure to accomplish a goal they all share, as in Figure 4. For example, Even Start, Head Start, and a local vocational program come to the realization that each shares the goal of empowering their community, so they decide to combine their efforts to create a new organization: The Community Empowerment Coalition (CEC). CEC members meet regularly to plan community empowerment initiatives, set policies for their coalition, pool resources from participating organizations, and celebrate their shared successes.
This convergent pattern is much like the highest level of Mattesich and Monsey's hierarchy, where previously independently-driven relationships move toward convergence at the highest, or collaboration level. This pattern is also comparative to the one-stop shopping, coordinated case management approach that is currently being advocated by many in the field of human services.

In theory, a single organization may engage in any number of concurrent collaboratives of varied patterns, as shown in Figure 5. An agency may be in a monadic relationship with one program, a dyadic relationship with another, a multidyadic relationship with two others, and a convergent relationship with several programs that have come together to focus on a given issue.

Figure 5. Example of Concurrent Collaboratives of Varied Patterns
It is assumed that the organization would not participate in any of these relationships unless the outcomes were helpful to achieving its own independent mission or goals. In the case of the convergent relationship, however, the organization has also assumed its own share of collective responsibility for achieving a common goal established by several organizations that have formed a new structure.

The Collaboration Conundrum

The variety and complexity of collaboration possibilities present a challenging decision-making task for agency administrators and staff. Moreover, although considerable information is available to guide agencies toward higher levels of collaboration, much less guidance is available for decision-making about whether and how to collaborate at lower levels of intensity. A number of questions need to be addressed by researchers to help agencies make more informed decisions about collaboration, especially those whose circumstances make collaboration at the highest levels infeasible:

- How should an organization decide who to collaborate with and in what pattern, intensity, etc. to achieve its goals?
- How does an agency determine whether to remain in independently-driven relationships with specific partners, or whether they should move toward a convergent relationship?
- How should a small organization with limited funding and influence go about collaborating?
- How can programs with conflicting goals and mandates successfully collaborate?
- Under what circumstances should an organization limit or even withhold commitment to collaboration?
If limited collaboration would be best, how can an organization effectively limit it to the appropriate level?

What does successful, low-level collaboration look like?

Answers to questions like these are vital for making quality decisions about collaboration in the fragmented, resource-strained environment of contemporary human services. Unfortunately, very little data are available at present to answer these questions. The results of this study do suggest, however, that rather than simply encouraging small programs such as Even Start to invest their limited resources in collaborating at the highest levels, we should be helping them realistically assess what forms of collaboration are possible, how they might be useful, and how to get there from where they are.

Summary

Results from focus groups indicated that collaboration in three of the six Even Start communities studied, Washington, Adams, and Hamilton, was at or near coordination, the middle level of the Mattesich and Monsey model. Collaboration in the other three communities, Jefferson, Madison, and Franklin, appeared to be somewhere below the lowest level of the Mattesich and Monsey model, cooperation. Interagency relationships in these three Even Start communities might best be described as at an identification level, at which programs have identified each other as partners, but interagency contact is minimal. Although agencies at this level may consider each other partners, they are likely to have relatively minimal knowledge about each other’s operations and clients.
Because three of six Even Start communities fit below the lowest level of the Mattesich and Monsey model, the authors' model had limited utility for this analysis. However, for interagency relationships at higher levels, the model was effective in helping to find the approximate intensity of collaboration. The Mattesich and Monsey model was chosen for this analysis because it was based on a broad review of collaboration literature and because its simplicity made an evaluation possible with data that had been collected for a different purpose. Although the primary focus of the model used in this analysis is on collaboration intensity, a comprehensive evaluation of collaboration would include numerous additional variables, especially outcomes related to the purposes of the interagency relationship.

Several lessons learned during the course of this study have implications for future research. First, by creating data sets that are amenable to examination from multiple perspectives, qualitative methods offer unique flexibility for data collection in secondary circumstances such as the present study. Second, it is likely that collaboration occurs in varied patterns, few of which resemble the highest levels of collaboration advocated by authors in the field. Finally, rather than broadly encouraging human service organizations to move toward the highest levels of collaboration, researchers need to provide answers to basic questions about what forms of collaboration are most productive, in which circumstances, and why.
References


