Measuring Collaboration: the Micro or Process Variables

Barbara J. Smith, Ph.D.
University of Colorado Denver
May 24, 2010

“Collaborations in Early Care and Education: Establishing a Framework for a Research Agenda”
ACF, OPRE, DHHS
Washington, DC
“Co-Labor”

• Collaboration is “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond what their own limited vision of what is possible (Gray, 1989)

• Collaboration is a process put into place for an intended outcome

• The process variables need to be researched to identify those that are most effective in helping the collaborators get to the intended outcome

• Collaboration is only as good as the process that is designed to support the interaction of the people who are supposed to engage in “co-labor”

• The collaboration meeting is the “co-labor” “work environment” and therefore, needs to be facilitative of the work to be done
Design the Process for “Co-Labor”: the “Work Environment”

• Who is the “workforce”?:
  – stakeholders, leaders, experts, depends on purpose
  – Numbers matter: 10-15
  – Consistency in meeting attendance: no reps

• What is the “work environment”?:
  – Establish common ground: vision, language, shared understanding on current context/challenges/resources
  – Attend to effective meeting logistics that promote effectiveness, efficiency and ownership/buy-in: frequency, length, convenience, ground rules, also balancing the need to be timely and action oriented
  – Provide resources (FTE, time, money, workscope, etc)
Measure the Process Variables

• Evaluate the “co-labor” and “work environment” or micro/process variables:
  • Survey’s, interviews and other qualitative methods to obtain perceptions of the effectiveness of:
    – Membership
    – Numbers
    – Consistency
    – Group norms (values, vision, shared language and concepts, meeting logistics, ground rules, etc)
    – “ownership” strategies
    – Resources and supports both within the collaboration as well as within each organization
    – Efficiency (were objectives, vision, action plans met?)
Process and Outcome Measures

Outcome Measures:

– Objectives and action plans (goal attainment, content analysis, etc)
– Effects on systems, policies (environmental scans, focus groups, policy analysis, content analyses, etc)
– Effects on consumers (measures of child outcomes, family outcomes, program outcomes, personnel outcomes, etc.)

Can we measure the link between process variables and intended and unintended outcomes?