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Supports and Barriers to Writing an Interagency Agreement on the Preschool Transition

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The purpose of this study was to examine how interagency agreements are developed that focus on the transition of children with special needs from early intervention programs to early childhood special education. Particularly, this study used elements of the conceptual models of collaboration proposed by Harbin and McNulty (1990) and Gray (1985) to study the conditions that might facilitate or impede the writing of these agreements and the possible changes of these conditions over time. Participants from four teams attempting to write an interagency agreement on the preschool transition were interviewed at three points in time, spanning 5 months. Results of the interviews suggested that writing an interagency transition agreement was a complex, multidimensional, and sequential process.

Progress has been made toward the goal of building a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, interagency service system for young children with disabilities and their families. The challenges associated with full collaboration among agencies, however, appear difficult to eliminate (Harbin, Gallagher, & Lillie, 1991; Johnson, 1994). One form of interagency planning testing the boundaries of full collaboration in a local community is transition planning. Transition at age 3 requires collaboration between agencies providing early intervention services and agencies providing preschool-age services in the community (Fowler, Hains, & Rosenkoetter, 1990). These agencies are likely to be located in different settings, and might represent different governmental entities carrying out different parts of federal and state laws and regulations. Consequently, meaningful differences might exist in characteristics of the population served, in the way resources are allocated to various subgroups, and in the way services are delivered. Without careful planning between agencies, the age 3 transition for children who qualify for Part B (special education) services might be disorganized or stalled (Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Fowler, 1994). Interagency agreements written by early intervention programs with local educational agencies, as well as with other receiving programs such as Head Start or private preschools, might counteract this possibility (Gallagher, Maddox, & Edgar, 1984; Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1999; Swan & Morgan, 1993; Wischnowski & McCollum, 1995).

A written interagency agreement is not a contract. Rather, it describes collaborative elements developed in the form of policy, procedures, and working relationships among

agencies (Elder, 1980). Harbin and McNulty (1990) noted, however, that interagency agreements might be stated in such general terms that they accomplish little, leaving service providers with the responsibility to develop informal arrangements on behalf of individual children and families.

Many states attempting to implement Part C have charged a system of local interagency coordinating councils (LICCs) with the responsibility of coordinating services for young children with special needs in their respective communities, including coordination across the age 3 transition. Interagency collaborative planning might be especially beneficial at the local level, because it can take into account local contextual factors affecting services. A local interagency agreement can be a product of this collaboration (Swan & Morgan, 1993) and can provide guidance for ongoing collaboration around the transitions of individual children and families.

Based on this knowledge of agencies and interagency efforts, Harbin and McNulty (1990) described six dimensions of interagency collaboration: climate (e.g., support from high-level decision makers in the various agencies, willingness to share resources), resources (e.g., staff time and fiscal resources to support the collaborative process), policies (e.g., the extent to which policies are similar or dissimilar across agencies), people (e.g., key individuals who participate), process (e.g., group facilitation and conflict resolution), and agency (e.g., the bureaucratic structures of the participating agencies). These dimensions form a conceptual model for studying and understanding interagency collaboration. In any particular interagency effort, conditions characterizing any one or more of these dimensions might or might not be conducive to collaboration, and can positively or negatively impact the collaborative effort as well as the child and family outcomes related to the effort. Hence, within each of these dimensions, both supports and barriers to collaboration can be identified (Harbin & McNulty, 1990).

An important foundation on which future collaboration will be based is the actual process of writing the interagency agreement.

Given that collaboration is necessary for developing this product, it might be expected that the six dimensions identified by Harbin and McNulty (1990) would also be useful for describing this process. In addition, however, we might expect that supports and barriers to collaboration would play out differently over time. Writing an interagency agreement on transition is a shared activity that might require many meetings by key people over several months. Gray (1985), synthesizing research findings from organization theory, policy analysis, and organization development, constructed a model of ''interorganizational collaboration,'' where conditions changed as collaborators moved through successive points of a process. She described how ''interorganizational domains develop through three sequential phases: problem-setting, direction-setting, and structuring'' (p. 916). Many of the supports and barriers Gray described are similar to those outlined by Harbin and McNulty (1990). Gray suggested, however, that the salience of certain supports and barriers would vary, depending on the phase of collaboration. Thus, whereas Harbin and McNulty's (1990) conceptual model anticipates key supports and barriers to interagency collaboration, Gray's model adds another dimension by imposing a sequential order, highlighting the need to consider the influence of certain supports and barriers at different phases of the collaborative process.

The purpose of the current study was to use the six dimensions identified by Harbin and McNulty (1990) to examine the supports and barriers to the process of writing an interagency agreement on transition, as perceived by participants in this process. To determine whether supports and barriers varied at different points in the collaborative process, data were also collected at three distinct times in the process of writing the agreement. The study was guided by two research questions:

1. What are the supports and barriers to writing a local interagency agreement on the age 3 transition, as perceived by participants in the process?

2. In what way do participants' perceptions of supports and barriers differ a) before the

time that the agreement is written, b) during the process of writing the agreement while training and technical support are provided, and c) after the agreement has been written?

METHODS

Participants
The 16 individuals who participated in this study represented members of four teams involved in writing an interagency agreement on preschool transition. These four teams were selected randomly from eight teams that had volunteered to participate in a regional training on the topic of interagency agreements. This training was the first of a statewide effort in which a majority of local interagency coordinating councils for early intervention services eventually participated.

The teams in this study were from the southern section of a large midwestern state. Teams varied in size from 5 to 20 members and typically had several individuals representing the early intervention, public school, or parent perspective. Because of the length and repeated nature of the interviews, we chose to sample from each team. For the purposes of the study, 4 members were identified from each team. Because each team was a subcommittee of a local interagency coordinating council, we invited the coordinator to participate in the study and to identify a parent, an early intervention administrator, and a school district administrator, who were likely to be active members of the writing team.

We contacted all nominated participants by phone. All 16 individuals agreed to be interviewed before, during, and after their involvement in the group training on interagency agreements. Table 1 provides information about the 23 counties represented by these four teams and Table 2 provides demographics for each interviewee.

Training Procedures
The eight teams, from which the four interviewed teams were selected, participated in two training sessions provided by FACTs/LRE (Family and Child Transitions into Least Restrictive Environments), a federally funded

Table 1.

Demographics for Each Participating Team's Service Area

Team	No. of Counties	No. of Early Intervention Programs	No. of Special Education Programs	No. of Children Who Will Transition this Year
1	6	4	3	80
2	3	1	3	20
3	5	4	3	28
4	9	3	3	40

Note. Special education programs are cooperatives representing many small school districts, and could represent more than one county. Cooperative personnel were more likely to participate on teams than district personnel. The number of children who will transition this year is an estimate figured by early intervention personnel.

technical assistance project. The FACTs/LRE project worked in cooperation with the state's regional technical assistance system and the state education agency to provide the training. The 1st day of training focused on the rationale for transition planning, regulatory language related to the age 3 transition and six policy issues: transmitting information, discussing transition issues with families, determining child eligibility for preschool services, preparing children for transition, selecting appropriate services, and monitoring the agreement. Staff provided the teams with guiding questions for developing the written agreement (Hadden, Fink, & Wischnowski, 1995). Information was presented and discussed throughout the morning. Teams began discussing and drafting their agreements during the first afternoon.

The FACTs/LRE trainers scheduled the second group meeting to occur 2 months later in consultation with the teams, and encouraged teams to meet about their written agreement as often as they thought necessary between the two training sessions. FACTs/LRE staff were available upon request to assist teams throughout the writing and early stages of implementing their agreement. Staff responded to requests for information and requests to facilitate local meetings. During the second session, the eight teams shared their drafts and

Table 2.
Demographics of Team Members Interviewed for This Study

Team	Position[a]	No. of Years in Position	Full or Part Time	Education[b]
1	LICC	2.00	P	B.S. in elementary education
	EIC	18.00	F	B.S. in child and family studies
	ECSEC	8.00	F	M.S. in school psychology
	Parent	7.00	—	1 year of college
2	LICC	0.50	P	A.D. in business
	EIC	1.50	F	A.D. in child development
	ECSEC	0.25	P	A.D. in data processing
	Parent	12.00	—	3 years of college
3	LICC	0.17	F	B.A. in sociology
	EIC	0.25	F	B.A. in social work
	ECSEC	4.00	F	M.S. in speech pathology
	Parent	7.00	—	High school
4	LICC	4.00	P	B.S. in social work
	EIC	1.50	F	M.S. early childhood
	ECSEC	16.00	F	M.S. continuing education
	Parent	16.50	—	3 years of college

[a]LICC = Local Interagency Coordinator, EIC = Early Intervention Coordinator, ECSEC = Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator.
[b]A.D. is an associate's degree from a community college.

continued writing, and FACTs/LRE staff provided additional information on how teams could evaluate the transition process.

Instruments

An interview protocol was developed after reviewing the literature on interagency collaboration, preschool transition, and interagency agreements. Interviews were piloted with representatives of a team who had written an interagency agreement during the preceding year. Four experts in the area of preschool transitions also reviewed the interview protocol. The interviews were comprised of open-ended questions, designed to obtain information about supports and barriers to writing an agreement across agencies. A sample of interview questions is shown in Table 3. Three versions of the protocol were used to note the passage of time between the first, second and third interviews.

Procedures

The first author served as the interviewer for the study. Although he was present during the training sessions, he did not serve as a consultant or a presenter for the teams participating in this study. The 16 participants were interviewed approximately 2 weeks before the first training session. Participants received a copy of the questions in advance of the interview. Participants were interviewed again approximately 2 months later, shortly before the second training session, while they were in the midst of writing their agreements. The third set of interviews took place approximately 2 months after the second training session, when participants were concluding their efforts to write the agreement or had finished writing. All but one interview was conducted using the telephone.

All interviews were tape-recorded, with the consent of the participants, and transcribed verbatim. The average length of an interview was 28 minutes, ranging from 12 to 55 minutes. Due to technical problems two of the taped interviews were not usable, these 2 individuals were re-interviewed within 1 week of the original interview.

Analysis

Two steps were taken to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data prior to analysis.

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Table 3.
Sample of Questions in First Interview Protocol

1. Tell me what happens when children make the transition from early intervention to early childhood special education (e.g., How does the process work in your community; Tell me how it may vary for families; Can you give me an example of when it worked; When it didn't work).
2. What are your feelings as you begin the process of writing a transition agreement with other agencies?
3. Tell me more about your role on the team (e.g., In what ways do you contribute to/support the team; What attributes do you bring to the team that might help/hinder the writing of this agreement; What will support you personally as you attempt to help write the agreement?)
4. Tell me about other factors that may influence the writing of an interagency agreement on transition at this time?
5. What do you think the team as a whole will need to successfully write the agreement?
6. What else do I need to know that will help me better understand the writing of an agreement in your community?

Following the third interview, participants received a transcription of their three interviews and were asked to make corrections and add comments or clarifications to ensure that the transcript accurately reflected their opinions. All 16 participants returned the transcripts, most noting no changes and the remainder noting only minor ones. The first author also conducted a fidelity check with each interview to determine the consistency with which interview questions were asked. He listened to each tape and scored the presence or absence of each question from the protocol. With the exception of one question in the second interview, all questions were asked in each interview. The exception represented a question that participants answered before it was posed.

Once these steps were completed, the first author and a research assistant coded the transcribed interviews. Interviews conducted at each of the three points in time were coded separately, beginning with the first interview. The six dimensions identified by Harbin and McNulty (1990) served as a priori categories for the initial coding. An "other" category was also established. Because the primary focus of the study was to identify factors that served as supports and barriers to writing an agreement, interview responses within each of these six dimensions and the "other" category were then designated as supports, barriers, or both.

As a first step in the analysis, both coders read each of the interviews thoroughly to gain a context for their coding. Second, they bracketed the interviews into individual units of analysis, following procedures Johnson and LaMontange's (1993) recommended. A unit of analysis was defined as a separate and complete thought (e.g., "Our local agencies had a history of meeting."). Units addressing one of the six dimensions (e.g., climate, resources) proposed by Harbin and McNulty (1990) or the "other" category were identified and sorted. Third, within each dimension, the two coders then sorted units into supports, barriers, or combinations of supports and barriers to interagency collaboration. A seventh dimension, labeled outcomes, emerged from the "other" category, and items in this new category were separated into supports and barriers. Fourth, the coders then reviewed all units of analysis within a specific dimension (e.g., resources) to identify clusters of units. Based on this process, more descriptive subcategories (such as "lack of staff time" or "scarce fiscal resources") were identified.

The last step was to rank order the dimensions from the most commonly to the least commonly mentioned one, and then to rank order subcategories of supports or barriers within each dimension. This process was repeated for interviews representing the three points in time: before training, during training, and 2 months after training. Units of analysis that addressed issues not related to the research questions were set aside and not used.

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These comprised the majority of units in the "other" category.

Interrater Agreement

When initially bracketing units of analysis, the two coders first worked together on several sample transcripts to achieve consensus on the process. Once they achieved consensus, they independently identified units and sorted them into the six dimensions and the "other" category. Interrater agreement, conducted on 10 of the 48 interviews, was 84% or above. Interrater agreement was figured as a percentage, with the number of agreements (i.e., units that were scored as belonging to the same dimension) divided by the number of agreements plus disagreements, multiplied by 100. A similar procedure was followed to sort units into supports or barriers within each dimension or category. The coders achieved a minimum level of agreement (80% or higher). The remaining interviews were coded independently once a minimum level of agreement was established in each of the seven dimensions on 10 interviews.

Interrater agreement was also assessed after coders identified common subcategories within each of the seven dimensions (e.g., lack of staff time as a subcategory for resources). Agreement of 85% or higher was reached on a sample of the interviews before sorting the rest independently.

RESULTS

We first asked what factors might serve as supports and barriers to the process of writing an interagency agreement around the transition from early intervention services to preschool services. The analysis of the 48 interviews revealed 22 distinct supports and 31 barriers. The majority of these were consistent with the six dimensions of collaboration originally proposed in Harbin and McNulty's (1990) model. However, we identified several new supports and barriers, as well as a seventh dimension, outcomes, which was not included in their model. We also asked if supports and barriers varied across the process of writing an agreement. Comparison of supports and

barriers identified in the first, second, and third interviews suggested that three supports and one barrier associated with the dimension of people (attitudes, skills, involvement, and lack of skills) were identified consistently by a majority of participants across time. Other supports and barriers tended to vary across the process of writing the agreement. Results for both questions will be discussed in detail.

Supports and Barriers to Writing an Interagency Agreement

The supports and barriers identified by participants during at least one interview are listed in Table 4. The participants in this study identified 13 supports and 18 barriers consistent with Harbin and McNulty's six dimensions, as well as 9 supports and 13 barriers not previously described. Most of the new supports and barriers reflected issues related to resources and policies or to the newly identified dimension of outcomes. In many cases, the exact opposite of an identified support was recognized as a barrier. Table 4 reflects these occurrences. For example, history of transition collaborations as a support was matched with its opposite as a barrier (e.g., no history).

People. The greatest agreement among participants' responses was seen in this dimension. All 16 participants cited skills, attitude, and involvement as important supports to the process of writing an agreement, and all cited lack of skills and involvement as barriers.

Process. This dimension also reflected the importance of involvement in writing the agreement. All participants identified supportive group actions as important, and 75% identified mechanisms for conflict resolution as important. Seventy-five percent cited lack of communication as a barrier.

Agency. The most frequently mentioned supports were history of agency cooperation and ability to change policies or the structure of the agency; the most frequently mentioned barriers represented the opposite of the supports. In addition, 81% of the participants cited the prior absence of parent and agency collaboration as an important barrier to the process of writing an agreement. Half noted that

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Table 4.

Supports and Barriers to Writing an Interagency Agreement on Transition

Dimensions and Subcategories	Harbin and McNulty	% of Participants Identifying This as a Support	% of Participants Identifying the Converse as a Barrier
People			
Team member skills	Y	100	100
Team member attitudes	Y	100	63
Key people involvement	Y	100	100
Process			
Supportive group actions	Y	100	94
Supportive communication	Y	69	75
Mechanisms for conflict resolution	Y	75	56
Agency			
History of agency cooperation	Y	81	75
Ability to change structure or policy	Y	69	75
History of agency or parent collaboration	N	17	81
History of transition collaborations	Y	0	81
Manageable number of sending or receiving agencies	N	0	50
Climate			
A cooperative interagency climate	Y	75	63
Support of administration to collaborate	Y	75	81
Children or family considered priority	Y	44	6
Involvement in the LICC	N	44	0
Resources			
Availability of quality training	N	83	31
Availability of quality technical assistance	N	63	31
Time for interagency endeavors	Y	0	75
Consistency of staff	N	0	63
Availability of quality service settings	Y	6	50
Fiscal resources for transition	Y	0	50
Rural interdependence	N	25	0
Availability of qualified staff	Y	0	13
Policies			
Policies that promote collaboration	Y	44	69
Lack of waiting lists	N	0	56
Supportive policies affecting LICCs	N	0	38
Agreement supplements or clarifies the law	N	0	31
Well-written interagency agreements	Y	0	31
Agreement not confused with legal contract	N	0	31
Recourse possible if agreement is not followed	N	0	25
State Department policy re: age 3	N	0	25
One state-approved assessment instrument	N	0	6
Outcomes			
Transitions will improve	N	94	6
Agency relations will improve	N	75	0
Team members gain knowledge	N	63	0
LICC's image improves	N	31	0

Table 5.

Supports Identified by 50% or More of the Participants Before, During, and After Writing the Interagency Agreement

Dimensions and Subcategories	Before	During	After
People			
Key people involvement	63	75	100
Team member attitudes	94	94	94
Team member skills	75	81	94
Process			
Supportive group actions	—	75	94
Mechanisms for conflict resolution	—	75	—
Supportive communications	—	50	—
Agency			
History of agency cooperation	81	—	—
Ability to change structure or policy	—	—	63
Climate			
Attitudes concerning need and value of collaboration	—	63	—
Support of key decision makers to collaborate	50	—	—
Outcomes			
Transitions improve	—	—	69
Agency relations improve	—	—	56

the number of agencies involved in the transition of children between early intervention and preschool services also represented a barrier.

Climate. Over half of the participants identified "attitudes toward collaboration" and "the support of key decision makers" as important in supporting their efforts to write the interagency agreement. Conversely, a majority also noted that "lack of support from key decision makers" presented a barrier to collaboration, as did a "competitive and mistrustful climate" category.

Resources. More barriers than supports were cited in this dimension. These included staff turnover, lack of staff time, scarce fiscal resources, and the lack of quality service settings. The two most frequently identified supports were availability of training and technical assistance. Issues of training, technical assistance, and staff turnover represent additions to the Harbin and McNulty (1990) model.

Policies. As with the resource dimension, participants identified many barriers. Conflicting, disparate policies and concerns specific to the age 3 transition, such as use of waiting lists for 3-year-olds, were stated most fre-

quently. Poorly written interagency agreements were also perceived as barriers by nearly one third of the participants. Many of these policy barriers were not included in the Harbin and McNulty (1990) framework. Less than half of the participants identified the dimension of policies as a support.

Outcomes. A seventh dimension, outcomes, emerged in this study. This dimension was characterized by the results that team members expected to achieve or experienced from the writing collaboration. Each of the participants identified at least one aspect of this dimension. Almost all cited benefits expected from the writing experience, such as improved transitions, improved agency relationships, and team members gaining knowledge.

Supports and Barriers in Relation to Time

Tables 5 and 6 list the supports and barriers most commonly reported before training, during training, and 2 months after training. Supports and barriers mentioned by 50% or more of the participants were tracked from interview to interview to determine whether these shifted across time or remained consistent.

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Barriers Identified by 50% or More of the Participants Before, During, and After Writing the Interagency Agreement

Dimensions and Subcategories	Before	During	After
People			
Lack of skills among team members	100	75	69
Lack of involvement by key people	—	88	88
Uncooperative attitudes among members	50	—	—
Process			
Unsupportive group actions	—	88	56
Agency			
No history of collaboration on transition	69	—	—
No history of parent or agency collaboration	69	—	—
Historical lack of agency collaboration	63	—	—
Climate			
Lack of support of key decision makers to collaborate	63	—	—
A competitive and mistrustful climate	56	—	—
Resources			
Lack of staff time to collaborate	—	—	56
Staff turnover	—	—	56
Policies			
Conflicting, disparate policies	—	63	—
Waiting lists for 3-year-olds	50	—	—

Only three supports, all in the people dimension (i.e., skills, attitudes, and involvement) and one barrier (i.e., lack of skills) were consistently mentioned by a majority of the participants across time. Team members' skills, attitudes, and involvement were in the forefront of what participants reported as necessary for the successful writing of a transition agreement. "A positive attitude" and "a common vision" were attitudes identified before the agreement was written, "commitment" and "a spirit of cooperation" were identified while the agreement was written, and "commitment" was the primary attitude mentioned 2 months following training as most agreements were finalized. The "involvement of key agencies" was consistent throughout the three stages of interviews. Another attribute reported consistently and prominently in the first two interviews was "knowledge of the law and the system." Before writing an interagency agreement, participants in this study were concerned about two different skills or experience: "knowledge of the law and system" and "experience with interagency work." Other dimensions were mentioned only at specific times by a majority of the participants.

Before writing the agreement. Historical factors related to people, agencies, climate, and policies often were cited in the initial interview. Participants were likely to discuss factors such as, (a) the people they anticipated would be directly involved in writing the agreement, (b) the key agencies involved in preschool transitions, (c) the general climate in which the people and agencies worked, and (d) one policy (LEA waiting lists for 3-year-olds) specifically blamed for jeopardizing transitions to preschool.

Lack of involvement by a key agency became an issue on every team and was forecasted by participants in the early interviews in their discussion of the climate and history of key agencies regarding collaboration. The LICC coordinator of team 2 spoke to the "reluctance" of key agencies to collaborate, "They don't want to step out there and volunteer and get involved . . . because it's easier and a lot safer to sit there where they're at. I don't know how you go about pulling them out of that. I am trying." Key school districts

were reported as sometimes absent on all of the teams. A large early intervention program also refused to cooperate with Team 1 throughout the study.

Positive attitudes deemed helpful to writing the agreement were expressed in each of the interviews. These included individual attitudes of "commitment" and "a spirit of cooperation" as well as team attitudes that formed "a common vision." People skills identified prominently in the first interviews were related to "knowledge of the law and the system" and the ability to use this knowledge to create positive change.

During the process of writing the agreement. Although the concerns regarding people remained strong once the teams began writing the agreements, an emphasis on the process of writing collaboratively also emerged. Participants concentrated on the mechanisms of getting the agreement written, signed, and implemented, replacing some of the contextual and historical emphasis provided in the first interviews. A majority of participants voiced concerns about the attitudes of key decision makers (the supervisors of transition team members) who were not participating in the actual writing of the agreement, but who had the power to sign and enforce it. A realization that many policies (not just the one related to waiting lists) affect preschool transitions also became a factor at this time. Participants voiced new awareness of conflicting policies among state agencies that might have contributed to the waiting lists, and to the differences between federal mandates and state and local interpretations and practices. Leadership skills continued as an important support during the second interviews. The ability to facilitate meetings and lead the team through the process of drafting the document was a critical role that needed to be filled on each team. Participants in Team 2 reported a lack of leadership at this stage, resulting in little progress toward a finished draft.

Two months after the last training. In the final interview, participants again stressed factors regarding the people and processes involved. Participants also said that the potential for positive outcomes (especially improved transitions and improved agency relations) helped them stay committed to the transition team. Concerns about agencies' rigidity toward change also emerged, along with the recognition that staff resources also were absent or continually changing. Although team members recognized some gains, many members were also aware of future challenges. These included: approval by people in higher administrative positions, implementation in the face of rigid practices by some agencies, and interagency monitoring of the agreement, which created a new role and test for LICCs in these service areas. A parent on Team 3, who in her first interview had been particularly upset with the waiting lists and the people enforcing them, indicated in her third interview a greater understanding of the many conflicting policies with which service delivery personnel were contending. Although she still found the waiting lists deplorable, she said, "I think my eye opener to this whole thing is that these guys really do care about these kids. But it's not them. It's this little book [policy] they have to follow. That's holding them back."

DISCUSSION

The conditions necessary to write an interagency agreement on the preschool transition, as described by the participants in this study, were largely in accordance with Harbin and McNulty's (1990) conceptual model for interagency collaboration. This study is the first attempt to validate such a model empirically. The study supported each of the dimensions identified by Harbin and McNulty and expanded the model with the identification of the outcomes dimension. Within each of the seven dimensions, discrete supports and barriers emerged and the list identified by Harbin and McNulty was enhanced. The study applied the model to a specific early childhood service delivery issue (preschool transition) and suggested future directions for research and practice.

The study also supported Gray's (1985) thesis that interagency collaboration unfolds sequentially in stages. Different supports and

barriers became more or less salient as teams moved through their collaborations. For instance, participants in the first interviews described how a history of interagency collaboration supported their initial decision to write an agreement. By the third interview, they no longer focused on history, but identified their agency's ability to change policies as a support. This shift in participants' description of supports and barriers across time suggests a need to assess the process of collaboration across time; A single snapshot in time is unlikely to provide the same richness or depth of information.

Most participants consistently mentioned the people dimension at every stage of the interviewing process. Specifically, participants identified supports and barriers associated with the involvement, attitudes, and skills of the writing team. The support evidenced by the commitment of key people was emphasized throughout the study. Key people were described as those who had an understanding of the daily requirements of transition, but also had administrative decision-making roles in their organizations. Key people also understood the law, expressed a positive attitude toward the task, and demonstrated shared leadership skills. When key people were lacking on the writing teams, even temporarily, participants reported that the collaboration floundered.

Harbin and McNulty (1990) described their model for collaboration as complex, multidimensional, and interactive. This was supported by our findings. People influenced and were influenced by supports and barriers identified under other dimensions. For instance, participants identified "support of key decision makers to collaborate" as a support under the climate dimension. In fact, all LEAs had received a letter from the State Department of Education in which they were encouraged to participate in the training and to write an agreement with early intervention agencies for the preschool transition. This supports the idea that the credibility of the convenor (the State Department of Education) in an interagency collaboration is important and helps key peo-

ple participate (Gans & Horton, 1975; Gray, 1985).

In the second interviews, process factors became more important to participants. Group and meeting facilitation skills were appreciated by most participants and were missed when not present. Team members who could express in writing the nuances of the transition process in a jargon-free and mutually acceptable manner were also valued. In the third interviews, the outcomes dimension emerged. Comments of participants suggested that they and other key people needed to see progress, or the hope of progress, to remain committed to the task; a phenomenon supported by Gray's work (1985).

Other examples of the interactive and sequential nature of the seven dimensions were demonstrated. The first set of interviews occurred before the agreement writing took place. Understandably, participant comments concentrated on past and present approaches to transition and the history (or lack thereof) of collaboration between local agencies. The writing provided, if not a first, then a fresh attempt to collaborate. Some participants felt that old issues needed to be addressed before progress could be made on the new endeavor; a notion supported by a conceptual model for conflict resolution (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). One team required intervention from a state education official to address a historical "turf" issue between two key agencies, before one of the members would come to the writing table. Although historical barriers like this one were identified in the agency and climate dimensions in the first interviews, they did not recur in the second interviews. Mechanisms for conflict resolution emerged as a need, however, in the process dimension. Once participants began to collaborate, the need to mediate past and present conflicts became more salient. By the time the third interviews were conducted, most writing team members appeared to have worked through conflicts enough to achieve a first draft. At this time they also concentrated on "going back home" with the agreement, citing agency factors related to rigidity that might prevent the agreement from being implemented. This

single theme of conflict appeared in different guises (and different dimensions) as the writing of the agreement proceeded.

Another example of this transformational complexity occurred with the policy dimension. Most participants considered waiting lists as a barrier to writing the agreement in their first interviews. The waiting lists represented an unwritten policy adopted by the LEA's preventing smooth transitions from occurring. If space was not available in a district preschool class, the child who had just turned 3 years old was placed on a waiting list, until a new class was opened or vacancies developed in current classes. Although waiting lists were not mentioned specifically thereafter, participants expressed in the second interviews a realization that sending and receiving agencies worked under sometimes conflicting policies. The first interviews contained more blameful language toward school districts for adopting waiting lists; the second interviews showed a better appreciation for the difficulties and constraints under which different agencies worked. The interagency agreement as a vehicle to address conflicts (Wischnowski & McCollum, 1995) appeared to have influenced the participants' views in the third interviews as they reported expectations of improved transitions for young children and their families, as reflected in the outcomes dimension. Writing the agreement in language in which all stakeholders could reach consensus, appeared to help teams address the waiting list issue and propose new procedures to avoid future occurrences.

Participants in the third interviews, although hopeful, did not overlook barriers to writing and implementing the agreement. The third interviews represented a stage of reflection on the collaboration thus far, and a look toward next steps (Gray, 1985). Besides the outcomes dimension, the resources dimension emerged prominently for the first time. Team members commented on the amount of extra time it took to engage in interagency efforts (Harbin & McNulty, 1990; Swan & Morgan, 1993) and on the frustration of team member turnover. This coincided with concerns over a given agency's ability to change policy and

structure, so that the finished agreement could be implemented successfully. Often, these concerns were directed at the LEA and reflected a general concern that such an agreement might never be implemented, despite the considerable effort it takes to write an interagency agreement (Hadden, Fowler, Fink, & Wischnowski, 1995).

Limitations

A possible limitation of this study is that only 4 representatives from each team were interviewed, whereas the number of total participants on each team ranged from 5 to 20. Head Start and private preschools had representatives on some of the teams and certain supports and barriers might have been missed because of their exclusion from the study. These 4 members were purposefully selected because they were present on all teams.

Interviewing participants over time, rather than once, certainly influenced the possibility that a sequential model of interagency collaboration would emerge. Asking participants questions before writing the agreement might force them into reflecting on past practices; hence, the first interviews identify more climate and agency history than do other interviews. The provision of training just before the second interview, corresponded with respondents' recognition of the importance of training and technical assistance (Rous et al., 1999). Conversely, outcomes emerged primarily in the third interviews when participants could consider the fruits of their labor. Nevertheless, the data derived from the study fit surprisingly well with Gray's (1985) conclusions, indicating that a sequential model might assist in the future study of interagency collaborations within the early childhood delivery system. A final limitation is that all data were gathered via interviews and that no data were collected on the team's participation during teaching, no direct observations were made of the interagency meetings, nor were minutes or notes from these meetings collected. The addition of such information could serve to clarify interview findings as well as confirm or disconfirm participants' comments.

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Implications for Practice and Policy

This study raises considerations for policy-makers hoping to achieve better transition outcomes. Facilitators of teams attempting to write an interagency agreement need to develop strategies for the recruitment and sustenance of key people. These include enlisting the support of state agencies in convening the opportunity for collaboration between local agencies under their direction (Gray, 1985). Also, writing teams might benefit from access to training or technical assistance to assist them in interagency collaboration addressing transition (Rous et al., 1999). Future facilitators should develop group-meeting skills and find ways to report progress toward the common vision of the completed task, as well as unintended benefits to team members. Important among the group and meeting facilitation skills are strategies to promote conflict resolution in an interagency context (Wischnowski & McCollum, 1995).

Agencies need to recognize the importance of interagency work and provide time and consistent team membership to collaborative activities. Appreciation for the interagency agreement as a dynamic document is also important. The agreements might change as state and federal policies change or as local practice indicates that other strategies might be more effective.

Implications for Research

The implementation of interagency agreements and whether they promote smoother transitions for 3-year-olds and their families, deserves future empirical attention. Interviews with representatives of more teams, as well as with other types of team members, would add to the generalizability of these findings. This study has further illuminated the complexity of interagency efforts first conceived by Harbin and McNulty (1990) and Gray (1985). Research now must measure the extent to which interagency collaboration and agreements improve the delivery and coordination of services to children. Are transitions timely? Do parents have an opportunity to participate? What are the benefits and the limits of an interagency agreement as a mechanism for collabora-tion? The impact of interagency agreements on the transitions of young children from early intervention to preschool requires further study.

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