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The Case of Interagency Coordinating Councils: Examining Collaborations in Services for Children with Disabilities¹

Dana Lee Baker¹

Abstract

Children with disabilities often require a myriad of services to develop to their full potential. In the current era, centralized services and residential institutions have become less accepted as a matter of course. Interagency Coordinating Councils (ICCs) were created to lead integration of services for children with disabilities in the context of decentralized service provision and a growing preference for person-centered, community based services. In this paper, the Federal ICC and several State ICCs were examined as a case study of the challenges associated with orchestrating multi-level, interagency collaboration. Emergent themes of interorganizational infrastructure, shaping participation, and service purposes and priorities are discussed as important elements of the ongoing creation of a new governance of services for children with disabilities.

The management of publicly provided services once had a reputation that mirrored the old housekeeper's mantra of "a place for everything and everything in its place." Government and service delivery organizations were partitioned into delineated

¹ Dr. Dana Lee Baker is Assistant Professor of Public Affairs at the Institute of Public Policy in the Truman School of Public Affairs, University of Missouri – Columbia. She can be reached at BakerDana@missouri.edu.

activities. These activities, in theory, had nested arenas of responsibility in the federalist structure of the government, from the federal government to the states to the thousands of local governments. Agencies at the same level of government were hoped to partition activities to avoid service overlap and limit turf confusion. The public policies and services designed to address needs associated with disabilities were no exception.

In the current era, however, sharing roles and responsibilities between levels of government and among agencies is increasingly favored (Craswell & Davis, 1994; Page, 2003). This blending of roles and responsibilities reshapes leadership, management, and service delivery challenges in the provision of services for children with disabilities nationwide. Collaboration has the potential to facilitate and strengthen person-centered and community-based services for individuals with disabilities and their families in part because of the increased potential for flexibility in service structures (Walter & Petr, 2000).

Among the most important expected benefits of blending roles and merging responsibilities are better, more cohesive service delivery, and an associated decrease in the time and energy individuals with service needs expend in an effort to receive appropriate government services. However, creating successful collaboration in the governance of service provision is far from automatic (George, Quinn & Varisco, 1997; Johnson, Zorn, Tam, LaMontagne & Johnson, 2003) and is unlikely to have an observable effect on programs or services without a collective focus on the collaborative process itself (Alkema, Shannon & Wilbur, 2003; Page, 2003). Interagency Coordinating Councils (ICCs) are designed to help lead successful collaboration in services for young children with disabilities (FICC, 2002).

The following is an analysis of the documents and discussion of ICCs during the late 1990s and early years of the current century. Though policy statements do not completely capture the scope of work in which organizations engage, written policies represent the negotiated public purpose of these efforts. The model of interagency (and other stakeholder) collaboration employed in formal collaborative efforts tends to have a significant impact on the nature and quality of services available for individuals (Johnson et al, 2003, Page, 2003; Riley, 1994). Given these factors, an examination of the expressed collaboration model is an important source of insight for future practice and policy development.

A Brief History of Interagency Coordinating Councils

ICCs were developed at both the federal and state levels as part of an effort to reshape the provision of services for young children with disabilities in the United States to better accommodate both resource constraints and complex demands for services (Alkema, Shannon & Wilbur, 2003; Bardach, 2001; Riley, 1994). State Interagency Coordinating Councils (SICCs) were mandated in 1986 as part of the early childhood development initiative of *The Education of the Handicapped Amendments* (P.L. 99-457). The following year, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that endorsed the establishment of a Federal Interagency Coordinating Council (FICC) (Garner, 1997). However, the FICC was not authorized until the 1991 amendments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

During the next few years, the influence and roles of the FICC and SICCs grew slowly. The FICC was strengthened in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA and a new

Memorandum of Understanding was signed by all participating federal agencies in March of 2000. During the late 1990s, many states also expanded the designated role of their SICC's focusing attention on the implementation of collaboration such as funding structures, changes in distribution of responsibility between agencies, and the appropriate way to engage all stakeholders in a more public arena.

ICCs changed alongside shifts in the conception of responsibility of governments with regard to services for individuals with disabilities during the 1990s. During the late twentieth century, disability came to be understood as at least partially the result of restrictive infrastructures deliberately created in society. This constructivist understanding of disability moved the preferred model of service delivery for individuals with disabilities from standardized and institutional toward person-centered and community based services (Stroman, 2003). The 1997 Reauthorization of IDEA was a difficult and muddled process complicated both by high profile issues such as discipline, and by long term disagreements, such as the distribution of fiscal responsibility between levels of government. Furthermore, the Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead vs. L.C.* (1999) asserted (but did not effectively provide for) the right of individuals with disabilities to live in community settings. This landmark decision further motivated governments to reconsider the traditional service delivery structures and approaches. ICCs were created to bring forth a blending role and redistribution of accountability in the provision of disability services to young children.

ICCs are intended to create and support a process of planning service delivery that fully involves all issue stakeholders from agency members to practitioners to policy makers to parents. Especially since innovative forms of collaboration will be increasingly

required as more individuals expect to receive services outside of an institutional setting, a more comprehensive understanding of the way in which collaboration is developing and encountering challenges in the ICCs is valuable to all those involved in the lives of children with disabilities.

Methods

Our guiding research question for this case study was: Do ICC documents and discourse reveal innovative collaborative elements that will better support community and person based services? We hypothesized that they would demonstrate (as yet) unrealized insights into effective collaboration that reflect a more constructivist understanding of disability. To examine how ICCs are envisioning successful collaboration and coordination, we analyzed documents produced by state and the federal Interagency Coordinating Councils. These documents are those that ICCs have deliberately designed to explain their purpose and goals (such as vision and mission statements and organization by-laws), and the public discourse of ICCs (as seen in transcripts, agendas, minutes, and presentation handouts of FICC meetings). We used a two-pronged approach to the case study: content analysis and discourse analysis.

Content Analysis

Content analysis has been widely applied to a broad scope of research questions about issues ranging from corporate mission statements to gender stereotyping in magazines to the representation of race in the Sunday comics (Brabant & Mooney, 1999; Morris, 1994; Schlenker, Caron & Halteman, 1998). In research related to the public sector, content analysis has been most frequently used in the studies of issue definition and thematic communication.

Content analysis measures the frequency of a given type of content such as particular images, references, or words (Angelique & Culley, 2000; Brabant & Mooney, 1999; Krippendorff, 1980; Milburn, Carney & Martinez, 2001). Because the content remains constant and can be observed without contamination of the data sources, content analysis is an excellent technique with which to make replicable and valid inferences about intent and context in social phenomena (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997; Krippendorff, 1980, p. 21; Morris, 1994). Formal content analysis begins with the creation of a catalog or dictionary of content for which the frequency of appearance in the sample media is measured (Angelique & Culley, 2000; Chandler & Griffiths, 2000; Krippendorff, 1980; Schlenker et. al, 1998).

In content analysis of the text of public documents, a thematic dictionary of words related to the issue of interest is employed. The creation of a dictionary is informed by previous research in the topical area and is designed to include a comprehensive list of words that tend to related to and indicative of discussion of issue of concern (Chandler & Griffiths, 2000; Morris, 1994). The dictionary employed “remains fixed during the analysis” (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 125). The words are then categorized into themes for analysis (Lucas, 2002). In this study, we used a dictionary of 77 collaboration and coordination related words listed below in Table 1.

Table 1

Content Analysis Dictionary

Adjudication	Advise	Affect	Agenda
Agencies	Appointed	Arbitration	Agreement
Assist	Blend	Bureaucracy	Collaboration
Committee	Commission	Communication	Community
Compromise	Consolidation	Consumer	Coordination(ated)
Consensus	Conversation	Council	Decision
Delivery	Develop	Director	Diverse
Efficiency	Flexibility	Funding	Fragmentation
Initiative	Mediation	Meeting(s)	Members
Interagency	Integration	Intermediate	Intervention
Joint Effort	Jurisdiction	Implement	Including
Memo	Mission	Multidisciplinary	Multiple
Negotiation	Network	Organization	Organize
Participation	Partner	Plan	Policy
Power	Problem	Program	Provision(s)
Regulation	Relationship	Report	Represent
Resolution	Resources	Responsibility	Seamless
Service	Settlement	Shared	Solution
Statewide	Strategy	System(ic)	Teamwork
Understanding			

Once the dictionary has been developed, a documents sample is selected. The sample of documents for this study included vision, mission and strategic planning documents from the federal ICC and from a deliberative sample of ten states selected to represent the geographical and socioeconomic diversity of the country (Idaho, Indiana, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, and Washington). As would be expected giving the timing of the ICC reformation, these statements were written between 1998 and 2000. Our unit of analysis was the entire text of the documents in the sample.

Each document in the sample was analyzed using Concordance, a computer program designed for formal content analysis of documents. Content analysis software, like Concordance, is used to generate an index of the frequency of use of each

meaningful word in the text (Morris, 1994). The index of each document in the sample was then analyzed for statistically significantly high appearance frequencies of the words in the thematic dictionary. A statistically significant use of a given word testifies to that concept's relative importance in the ICCs' envisioned purpose (Abernethy, 2000; Krippendorf, 1980; Lucas, 2002). Close variants of the words (such as the plural form) were counted and variation in the length of the documents was controlled for. To make sure the words were used as expected, a randomly selected sample of one hundred appearances of the words was checked to make sure the dictionary words were predominantly used in collaborative contexts. We then used a t-test to determine which words were used a statistically significantly higher number of times than other words in the thematic dictionary.

Content analysis is sometimes criticized as being insufficiently focused on the context that produces the heavily negotiated public policy products. After all, documents such as mission and vision statements represent the negotiated image of collaboration more accurately than the ongoing collaboration processes within public organizations. Whereas content analysis is useful for analyzing the negotiated and static image of the collaboration goal, discourse analysis is useful for examining "cultural dynamics in action" (Bennington, Shetler & Shaw, 2003).

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a broad methodological term encompassing many different systematic processes for examining language and its context (Bennington et. al., 2003; Boutain, 1999; Zeeman, Poggenpoel, Myburgh & Van der Linde, 2002). The term generally refers to research approaches using units of analysis at least one sentence long

within a selected sample of texts (Bennington et al., 2003; Schiffrin, 1994). Discourse analysis rests on the theoretical assumption that language both constitutes and creates human reality (Boutain, 1999; Zeeman et. al., 2002). As a result, the examination of language used in discussion can be used to generate insight into the organizational context in which the discussion took place (Zeeman et. al., 2002).

To provide greater insight into the collaboration process of the ICCs, we also used discourse analysis in this study. Whereas the content analysis provided insight about the outcome of negotiation of collaboration, the discourse analysis provided insight into the negotiation itself.

To examine the public discourse, we reviewed materials produced for and during FICC meetings held between 1997 and 2003. These documents were searched for direct discussion of success and challenges in the collaboration for service delivery for children with disabilities. A catalog of discussion of successes and challenges was created. Two graduate research assistants who had completed core courses in a masters program in public affairs and who were given additional instruction in discourse analysis created the catalog. A random sample of the documents was reviewed to ensure inter-coder agreement. The references to successes and challenges were then sorted by the collaboration themes found to the most prevalent in the content analysis. Finally, we took note of the prevalence of each theme and the focal points of each of the discussions of challenges and successes.

Results

Content Analysis Results

Words from the dictionary were found in all of the documents in collaboration contexts in all of the federal documents. Table 2 shows how many of the words appeared in each of the federal documents and their range of frequencies per hundred words.

Table 2

Overall Interagency Words Usage (Federal Documents)			
Document	Total Number of Words in Text	Percent of the Interagency Words that Appeared	Range in Appearance Frequency Per 100
FICC Strategic Plan	244	29.5%	0.12 to 2.87
Memorandum of Understanding	2042	50.0%	0.05 to 1.47
Recommended Benchmarks of Health Care Benefits for Newborns, Infants and Children	1125	34.6%	0.18 to 2.84
Principles of Family Involvement (Mission, Vision and Principles)	842	39.7%	0.12 to 1.97
FICC By-Laws	3290	52.8%	0.03 to 2.77

The words from the collaboration dictionary that appeared with high frequency in the federal documents were: agencies, assist, meeting, members, program, state and service. This group of words appeared at least .18 times per hundred words (around 2 times per thousand) and up to 2.77 times per hundred.

Words from the collaboration dictionary also appeared in all of the state documents, up to 4.44 times per hundred words. The only word that appeared with high frequency in all of the state documents, however, was service, which appeared at least 4 times per thousand words in the state documents.

These high frequency words, particularly those found in the federal level documents, suggested many possible themes surrounding collaboration that are key to

discussion taking place at the FICC. The themes of particular interest suggested by the group of high frequency words in the federal documents were: interorganizational infrastructure (suggested by state, agencies, and program); shaping participation (suggested by assist, meetings, and members) and, especially given its prevalence in the state documents, service purposes and priorities.

Table 3

Overall Interagency Words Usage (State Documents)			
Document	Total Number of Words	Percent of Interagency Words that Appeared	Range of Frequency Per 100
The Connecticut Birth to Three System, Annual Report	7942	61.5%	0 to 1.15
Mission, Vision and By-law Statements (Idaho)	5417	56.4%	0 to 1.29
Indiana's Early Intervention System for Infants, Toddlers and Their Families, Annual Report	14892	74.4%	0 to 1.03
Mission Statement (Indiana)	175	56.4%	0 to 3.43
The Montana Family Support Services Advisory Council Mission and Bylaws (Montana)	3182	59.0%	0 to 2.70
SICC Mission Statement (Nevada)	730	34.6%	0 to 1.64
North Carolina ICC Mission Statement (North Carolina)	219	20.5%	0 to 4.11
SICC Mission Statement (Oregon)	225	28.2%	0 to 4.44
Early Intervention in Pennsylvania, Annual Report (Pennsylvania)	1991	47.4%	0 to 1.21
Agency Strategic Plan (Texas)	12760	80.8%	0 to 2.16
ICC Mission and Vision (Vermont)	435	28.2%	0 to 1.61
Mission and Vision Statements (Washington)	1634	51.2%	0 to 1.71

Discourse Analysis Results

In our catalogue of discussed challenges from the transcripts, almost all were classifiable under one of the three themes suggested by the content analysis. In the challenges discussed in the FICC meetings, 36.9% were discussions of organization,

29.7% were discussion of participation, and 30.1% were discussions of service. The successes described were less easily classified, particularly because the successes discussed were most often specific achievements of individual participants or organizations in the participants' home policy arena (e.g. FICC Meeting Minutes, September 2000; FICC Meeting Minutes, November 2000). Nevertheless, of the successes found in the discourse, 37.4% were related to organization, 18.1% were related to participation, and 11% were related to (specifically ICC) services purposes and priorities. Our analysis reflected that creating a collaborative organizational infrastructure was a consistent challenge but one in which ICCs were making important progress, that participation was enthusiastic but difficult to manage or cast collaboratively, and that defining service in collaboration under a constructivist understanding of disability was a continuing exercise for which there was consistently sufficient enthusiasm.

Theme One: Interorganizational Infrastructure

ICCs bring together diverse organizations and individuals into a collective setting intended to revolutionize the delivery of a broad based set of activities. Though interagency coordination is not an entirely new phenomenon (Harley, Donnell & Rainey, 2003; Jones, 1985), the specific interagency infrastructure ICCs set out to create takes stakeholders and participants into "an area of uncharted waters" (FICC Meeting Minutes, December 1998). As a result of this, at the earliest meetings while there was much potentially useful information shared, there appeared also to be no common sense of direction or specific goals.

At the end of 1999, there was observable optimism that an effective interorganizational infrastructure was being created. For example, one council

participant explained, “we hang together because we share a common concern, but we also share common solutions and I think that common solution piece is one of the absolute strengths that we bring to this group” (FICC Meeting Transcripts, December 1999). Taking intention to reality requires very deliberative work that focuses not only on the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families but also on inclusion oriented changes to society’s infrastructures (e.g. physical, fiscal, programmatic and political) (FICC Meeting Summary, December 2001). This work is best accomplished by organizational infrastructure that takes opportunistic advantages of the differing strengths and resources of participants and agencies.

The discussion of organizational challenges in the FICC meetings often reflected a tension between habitual separation of activities between agencies and developing a consistent identity for the organization. ICCs naturally involved several layers of coordination both “within our agencies and across our agencies” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 2, 1999). The case of the FICC demonstrated that in order to direct effective collaboration, it must first be practiced. As was expressed in a moment of frustration in March of 1999, “we can talk till we’re blue in the face about coordination, but if we can’t fix this one little coordination effort, the, really, I think that makes hollow much of what we do talk about when we talk about coordination” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1999). The FICC discourse included many references to the need to “figure out how to collaborate” (FICC Meeting Minutes, June 2002). As has been seen in other collaborative cases (Page, 2003), the ICC case demonstrated that coordination activities require more, rather than less, overt leadership. Careful planning of the

interorganizational infrastructure is more than just a process issue in that it shapes collaborative service potential.

The FICC discourse reflected that coordination across and between extant organizational structures and expectations requires heavy investment in communication, in both the mechanisms and language of communication. In order to have effective multi-lateral collaboration, communication must be explicitly negotiated while maintaining enough flexibility to prevent exclusion. The potential for exclusion included those directly involved in the FICC (the “internal”) and stakeholders who were not direct FICC participants (the “external”) (FICC Meeting Transcript, August 1995). For example, language was an oft-expressed organizational challenge in the discourse. One participant asked “Could you not speak in acronyms? What’s NIH?” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 4, 1999). Another participant stated, “one of my goals during my tenure on the FICC is to provide information in Spanish” (FICC Meeting Transcript, February 1996).

Another organizational challenge was the ability to get work done collaboratively between meetings when participants do not work in the same agency or geographical location. FICC council members were often not “within the Beltway” (FICC Meeting Transcript, November 1997). For example, at the September 2000 FICC meeting, when asked to report on committee activity, each of the four state ICC priority area committees scheduled to update reported that they were still working on finding a meeting time. A reported contributing factor was that the FICC was understaffed.

Extending human capacity beyond the council meeting is not simply a question of participant motivation. It is also a question of cross-agency commitment, which, in a professional world where few are faced with the challenge of filling empty hours, should

be a constant focus of leadership. The FICC did significant work towards creating a workable vision and mission statement that effectively expressed interorganizational infrastructure. As one participant explained, “I think one of the lackings of the FICC that we saw as we were doing the strategic plan...I think we are doing better on that” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1998). This suggested that talking about collaboration is a necessary activity in order for all participants and other stakeholder to completely accept the process. Making time for discussion of collaboration itself was challenging (FICC Meeting Summary, December 2001). Even when time was available, it could not always be coordinated between meetings, even to schedule a conference call (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1998). Furthermore getting buy in was made more complex since a goal of the ICC was to function both outside and above the government structure. This generated confusion about the authority of the FICC. For example, a participant noted, “I am not so sure that we have the power to actually tell federal agencies how they are supposed to do their technical assistance” (FICC Meeting Transcript, June 1998).

The FICC discourse also demonstrated the necessity (and difficulties) of a malleable but shared understanding of resources for interorganizational infrastructures. The division of financial responsibility as part of organization commitment was a challenge because “if it is really going to be an interagency activity, it means money also” (FICC Meeting Transcript, June 1998). In the FICC discourse, the resource infrastructure was not immediately addressed. In December 1998, a participant noted, “This is the first time that the FICC has sat down to consider actually putting interagency financial support behind the idea of collaboration. That’s what I came for. I feel very strongly that we should do this” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1998). Money

could be difficult to secure given that for ICC council members “when you get into specific budget levels, the representatives that were put here were not necessarily for that purpose... They may not have that role back in their agency” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1999). Information as a resource was also a common discourse element for reasons such as confidentiality for reasons such as “about 43 percent of the agencies that we contacted indicated that confidentiality is a barrier to local inter-agency coordination” (FICC Meeting Transcript, May 1996). Finally, social capital—or “trust”—was an initially scarce resource that the FICC built steadily (FICC Meeting Transcript, June 25, 1998).

Determining organizational structure is therefore an ongoing activity for effective collaborative work. The FICC discourse suggested that while organization should not become the sole activity of the collaboration that the successful creation of interorganizational infrastructure must include direct discussion of purpose, resources, and roles in order to succeed (FICC Meeting Minutes, December 2001; FICC Meeting Presentation, June 2002). This “action” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1999) question was directly addressed more than once within the discourse of the FICC as a way of reminding the group of the necessity for action beyond shared words.

Theme Two: Shaping Participation

The FICC discourse included many references to enthusiastic participation. For example, the chair opened the December 1998 meeting by saying “I want to begin by first praising the great turnout, we have a lot of people here, and that is terrific” (FICC Meeting Transcript). This enthusiasm was, however, countered by challenges to the management of participation. Resignations from the council were quite frequently

reported, often because “good people do good things, and then they move on to do more good things” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1999). Members were also frequently absent or present for only part of the meeting (FICC Meeting Transcript, September 2000).

Nevertheless, the FICC discourse consistently reflected a willingness to do a lot of work for the cause. Members brought products to meetings that were “clearly a lot of work” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1999). Nevertheless, the quarterly meetings meant that time pressure was intense to “get through all these reports” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1999). This pressure was exacerbated by the fact that there tended to be a lot of information (FICC Meeting Transcript, August 1995; FICC Meeting Summary, December 2001). People often did not have time to read through materials before they came to the meeting. Also, good ideas sometimes were left behind for lack of time when participants “never did get around to doing anything about” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1999) ideas discussed during meetings.

The FICC discourse also repeatedly addressed the question of who should be involved and under what circumstances. As was discussed at one council meeting, “the significant policy issue that was brought up and discussed with me was whether we should automatically just include the assistant secretary of OSERS as the co-chair, or whether we should just open up to a similar kind of election process of the whole FICC” (FICC Meeting Transcript, January 1998). The council was designed to make sure that the resources available for services for children with disabilities are used in a manner that ensures the maximum possible influence which means that participation must be simultaneously (and somewhat paradoxically) open and limited. An FICC participant

explained this by remarking that part of the FICCs purpose is “to try to articulate the issues that need to be addressed in order to not have so much duplication, replication of intent among those programs” (FICC Meeting Transcript, August 1995). To accomplish this mission the need for a carefully crafted mix of participants must be balanced against the desire the broadest possible scope of participants.

A related aspect of the challenge of defining participation revealed in the discourse is that intended council composition is not necessarily clarified through prospective participant profiling. Stakeholder groups are not unilateral. As one council member explained when discussing parent involvement was the perception that “FICC parents” (FICC Meeting Transcript, June 1998) were somehow different from other parents of children with disabilities. Including a broad base of families can be difficult as a functional reality, especially when all families do not necessarily have the available time and resources to attend meetings (FICC Meeting Minutes, June 2002). The FICC discourse reflected a fairly consistent concern that such stakeholders not become “an afterthought” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1998).

The definition of participation (beyond enthusiastic buy-in) was also addressed in the FICC discourse. Success in this was somewhat long in coming. One participant commented after a couple of years of FICC meetings that the FICC had finally “obtained a critical mass to move this interagency body forward” (FICC Meeting Transcript, November 1997). Having this critical mass meant moving some individual’s participation into the realm of leadership, a move that might chaff against the grain of a collaborative environment. This was discussed, for example, with the remark that, “we also heard the issues of leadership loud and clear, that it really was that person or group

of persons with vision and energy to make it happen. Otherwise initiatives are dying on the vine” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1998). Having revolving or divided leadership served as a guard against participation becoming overwhelming (FICC Meeting Transcript, June 1998).

Participation includes not only time, but also money. In the FICC case there was expressed concern that participation be defined as composed of various resources because, for example, “money is nice, but time and effort and commitment of your knowledge and expertise is really vital” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1998). At other times, however, the need for fiscal support was much more strongly expressed (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1998; FICC Meeting Presentation, June 2002). Though the proportions will vary by participant, it would seem, the answer to the question of whether participation involved time or money is “both.”

Theme Three: Service Purposes and Priorities

“Service” was the only word that appeared with statistically significantly high frequency in all of the documents examined in our content analysis. In our review of the federal transcripts, we found many references to successes and challenges associated with services. Creating and supporting effective services is a perennial negotiated challenge under the modern understanding of disability because service provision is no longer understood as a unidirectional charitable act but as a collaborative element of society’s essential infrastructures (Stroman, 2003).

A dominant aspect of the service related challenge was the *raison d’être* of the ICCs—the fact that truly coordinated service models are a rare commodity in a multiple agency universe with emphatically siloed funds (FICC Meeting Agenda, March 2003).

Even after several years of the FICC existence, a participant stated that there were “very few models...available for serving the children” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 4, 1999) that were both constructivist and collaborative. The lack of extant models gave the ICCs the opportunity to collaboratively identify priorities, but also meant that a first step the ICC had to take was limiting the focus on immediate collaborative service activity. As one participant put it, when it came to developing coordinated services “the first priority was easier access to existing services. The second priority was they really felt a need for improved coordination. The third priority was a need for additional family supports” (FICC Meeting Transcript, May 1996).

One of the fundamental mechanisms that had to be put in place to achieve these goals was a move toward more coordinated funding structures. As was explained the following year at an ICC meeting integrated services depend on “integrated funding streams” (FICC Meeting Transcript, November 1997). Since access to service is often governed by access to funding for services, this coordination was absolutely necessary to the creation of a truly collaborative environment. Access to funding as a bridge to service was of particular concern to ICC parent participants who, for example, were in contact with families paying \$1,200 to \$2,000 out-of-pocket for services because “they didn’t feel they could work the system” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1999). Another parent explained that securing services can make families feel as if they are “in the middle of a battlefield” and asked the FICC to “be the Red Cross” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1998).

The subjectivity and individuality of the experience of disability means that needs for services are broad based and numerous (FICC Meeting Summary, December 2001).

In the formalization of service provision (and in the formalization of the coordination of service provision) more people involved does not necessarily mean that service needs are met (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1999). The FICC discourse consistently reflected a commitment to being “bold” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1998) about service provision, both in the sense of addressing (rather than avoiding) the challenge of service definition and in the breadth of issues addressed. Part of being bold included collaboratively creating a broad based (rather than limited) mission that left room for the constant consideration of new service genres (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1998).

In the provision of services, even in a collaborative environment, there is the practical necessity of ultimate division of labor (FICC Agenda, March 2003). With a withering of the notion of separate agency turfs, “a major issue becomes which one of the services are covered or provided by each program” (FICC Meeting Transcript, February 1996). The FICC discourse repeatedly suggested that the division of labor in a collaborative setting must be much more porous and flexible than has been habitual in the history of the provision of services for children with disabilities in the United States in order to make services more accessible (FICC Meeting Summary, December 2001). As one FICC participant put it, “as we strive toward a seamless system of services...we admit to having a rather seamy system of services currently” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1998).

However, the FICC discourse reflected that service challenge is most forcefully shaped (and ultimately dominated) by the seeming unquenchable demand for services that agencies and individuals providing services to children with disabilities face. As one

participant put it, “In California they’re diagnosing seven children a day with a disorder. ...And so there’s a, there’s a war out there” (FICC Meeting Transcript, March 1999). The charge to be bold is, of course, in natural tension with an environment that might be desperately trying to control demand (FICC Meeting Transcript, September 2000; FICC Meeting Minutes, June 2002). One parent presenter explained her frustrations with the health insurance by saying that “the name of the game is to deny coverage using whatever means possible” (FICC Meeting Transcript, December 1998). The FICC discourse referenced deliberate and desperate moves to minimize service demands by keeping people out of the system (FICC Meeting Transcript, November 1997). Since a main goal of collaboration is to ensure access to service, the FICC found itself in natural tension with these environmental concerns.

Discussion

ICCs are important both because they build genuine collaboration into the formal structure of governance and because they are expected to be a partial antidote to the perennial agency and nonprofit resource constraints. In undertaking this case study we hypothesized that the analysis of ICC documents and discourse would reveal (as yet) unrealized insights into effective collaboration that reflect a more constructivist understanding of disability.

In the content analysis, the collaboration dictionary words found most frequently were: agencies, assist, meeting, members, program, state, and service. These words are very traditional components of organization discourse and reflect an intention to fit collaborative activity around extant governance and service delivery structures. Mission and vision statements appear to have been constructed to be not overtly revolutionary

(and therefore less threatening to potential coordinating council participants, stakeholders, and agencies). Process oriented words such as consensus, coordinated, seamless, multidisciplinary, teamwork, and understanding were found far less frequently than the traditional infrastructure oriented words. This focus on traditional organizational infrastructure that does not, however, completely desert or destroy is a constructivist element in keeping with our hypothesis.

The discourse analysis also revealed discussion of collaborative elements reflecting a constructivist understanding of disability that are in the process of becoming realized into governance and practice. The discussion of successes and challenges was quite in keeping with the core elements of the vision and mission statements shown in the content analysis. Eighty-five percent of all discussed challenges and successes could be classified into the three most prevalent themes of interorganizational infrastructure, shaping participation and service purposes and priorities.

The ICC case demonstrates that collaboration is not simply a synonym for participation. Collaboration proved to be an ongoing activity rather than a structure for activity. The early experience of the FICC showed that collaboration taking place without an effective and accepted interorganizational infrastructure can become little more than undirected information sharing. While information sharing is a useful activity in its own right, collaborative activity does not tend to emerge spontaneously from it. The challenges and successes of the FICC related to organizational structure suggest that it takes an infrastructure to change another infrastructure (whether the target infrastructure is physical, fiscal, policy, or programmatic).

This interagency infrastructure includes a mechanism for resource sharing (if not blending), overt leadership and a sufficient allocation of time both in terms of time spent in collaboration and in terms of timelines for changes in policy and practice (Harley et. al., 2003). In a collaborative setting, leadership needs to be more, rather than less, overt. This can help ensure that the interorganizational infrastructure maintains its integrity, thereby preventing collaboration from becoming simply a side activity of more traditional agencies and organizations. Furthermore, as the discourse analysis of the FICC suggests, a key feature of interorganizational infrastructures is that they be opportunistic. In traditional (particularly public) organizations, the organizational infrastructure is deliberately constructed as inflexible and slow to change. In a collaborative setting, the involvement of multiple traditional agencies means that the interorganizational structure should take advantage of participant strengths and weaknesses as they present themselves.

The ICC discourse analysis also demonstrates an evolving understanding of participation that reflects a more constructivist understanding of disability. There is near constant enthusiasm and a willingness to work for the cause reflected in the documents examined. The overarching challenge in interagency or interorganizational collaboration is to operationalize this willingness and enthusiasm without relying on traditional signals of commitment within a bureaucratic setting (such as regular meeting attendance). While collaborative efforts may be or become the full time job of those involved in interagency or interorganization groups, the collaboration exercise itself is not (Thompson, Socolar, Brown & Haggerty, 2002). Providing too much information is a common problem in collaboration and should be checked against the desire not to limit information available to participants and other stakeholders.

The ICC case also demonstrates that participation is never a closed question in collaboration. In modern collaborative efforts, the composition of the governing body is consistently revisited (Alkema et. al, 2003). As was found in the ICC discourse, member profiling or quotas do not work toward effective collaboration under a constructivist understanding of disability, often because leaders tend to work within multiple traditional organizations. This tends to differentiate them from others in their stakeholder category.

Some categorization will, however, be retained due to the need for a variety resources to support the interorganizational infrastructure. The resources question must also be directly addressed as part of effective collaboration, even if this means involving individuals who are not traditionally involved in their agency or organization's budgeting decisions. The necessity of equating part of participation with financial support will tend to ensure a level of participant categorization, if for no other reason that individual participants (as opposed to agency representatives) would not typically be expected to provide financial support.

Service is inherently selective. Even in a perfectly collaborative and resource rich environment, the provision of services requires a level of agreement on the definition of services. In a less than perfect environment, challenges associated with this reality must be ever more carefully addressed as a collaborative environment is developed to guard against unintended exclusion. As the preferred model of services for individuals with disabilities and their families becomes more decentralized and person-centered, it becomes potentially more difficult to involve multiple agencies in these one-on-on interactions. However, the person-centered services tends have the individual as opposed

to the diagnosis as the unit of analysis. This means that lifespan issues such as transition should become more directly and consistently considered (Alkema et. al, 2003).

As the ICC case demonstrates, interorganizational infrastructures understand that they are designed to provide an organizational location for coordination of person centered services but are in the process of learning to manage this role. The ICC case shows that in the current era, expanding access to services in general is sometimes placed in opposition to expanding collaboration of services for individuals already in the system. Provisions for interagency funding partially prevent this detrimental opposition. It is also necessary to work to prevent efforts to limit demand for services by agencies and organizations providing services as an important element of effective interorganizational collaboration. As is discussed above, in the case of the ICCs there is a nearly unwavering commitment to the creation of a new reality of service provision for children with disabilities. In discussing challenges, it is crucial not to forget the fact that successes in the provision of services are a growing experience in the United States.

Conclusion

The ICCs represent an unfolding story of change in governance of services (Bardach, 2001; George et. al, 1997). The integration of services for children with disabilities is far from complete. A primary implication of our analysis of ICCs is that collaboration is a learned process with its own formal interorganizational infrastructure rather than an activity or organizational element. The bureaucratic and interagency agreements will better affect practice if collaboration is seen as a necessary component of service delivery instead of a separate service or program goal (Johnson et. al, 2003, Walter & Petr, 2000).

In our case study we found that constructivist elements were central to the ICC discourse during the late 1990s and early 21st century. Collaboration came to involve both blended roles and shared responsibilities. The analysis of the ICCs demonstrated that given time groups positioned above and beyond formal institutions of governance are capable of managing such effective collaboration. Because a strong process foundation is built into the new interagency collaboration, it is likely that in time services for individuals with disabilities will become much more person centered and well within a constructivist understanding of disability.

Not enough is currently being done to analyze and publicize collaboration experiences. In examining the evolving practice of coordination and collaboration, study of the way in which challenges are being addressed over time will be the focus of upcoming research. After all, as was expressed in a November 1997 FICC meeting after an extended discussion of challenges, “people are doing solutions, and you’re seeing some unusual but very exciting partnerships, and I think if it can happen in that kind of environment, it ought to be able to happen just about anywhere” (FICC Meeting Transcript, November 20, 1997). The overarching goal should be to ensure that these solutions learn from one another as time goes on.

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