THE DANCE OF MANY PARTNERS:

A CASE STUDY OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION

IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR

By

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# Abstract

This thesis is a case study of interorganizational collaboration. Qualitative methods facilitated reports of 25 participants' experiences of a collaborative planning process to restructure children's social services in London, Ontario (Canada). The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the process dynamics of collaboration. Factors that impeded and/or facilitated collaboration were discussed. The influence of asymmetrical social relations of power on collaboration was observed in examples participants cited. However, much of the literature reviewed on factors that influence interorganizational collaboration did not include a critical analysis of social relations of power in collaboration. Social relations of power must be recognized as part of the process that mediates who and what is heard and valued. Relations of power are an inherent, evolving and unavoidable part of the present context of collaboration. Without an explicit critical analysis of relations of power, theories of interorganizational collaboration will cloak with invisibility the reality of present power disparities while struggling in practice to manage their effect. To recognize asymmetrical relations of power in collaboration, theories of interorganizational collaboration and praxis must acknowledge and foster a political epistemology - an explicit power analysis.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

A dance. Remember a time when you danced with another; the magic; the clumsy motions; a sense of fit or lack thereof; the angst; the intimacy; the miscommunication; the intricate steps; the moments of joy; whirling around; shared pleasure; embarrassment for toes trodden; connection; a process - an experience.

The creation of collaboration between organizations, members of the community at large and governments is similar to a dance with many partners. It is indeed an art. It is profoundly influenced by the stage on which it occurs. It faces many obstacles and requires skill and understanding of the necessary steps, motions, and relationships to achieve and sustain the partnership.

## Literature on interorganizational collaboration

The literature reviewed suggested the following factors influence the dance of collaboration: the environment, purpose and resources, process and structure, communication and membership (e.g., Gray, 1989a; Himmelman, 1996; Winer & Ray, 1994). The perspective of much of the literature reviewed was functional - a series of factors that if paid attention to then collaboration may provide a solution to the problem being addressed (e.g., Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996; Halpert, 1982; O'Looney, 1994;

Winer & Ray, 1994). However, asymmetrical relations of power, that are part of the context or stage of interorganizational collaboration, are not critically analyzed by most of the literature reviewed for their influence on collaborative endeavor (e.g., Barr & Huxham, 1996; Bowers Andrews, 1990; Gibelman & Demone, 1991). Factors that influence collaborative endeavor need to be researched further, it is argued in the literature, by utilizing qualitative methods.

## The study's concern and purpose

This study reports participants' experiences of a collaborative planning process to restructure children's social services in London, Ontario. The collaboration involved children's social service providers, consumers of services, governments and other community members.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the dynamics of the implementation planning phase of the restructuring project. Interviews with participants focused on factors they felt inhibited and/or facilitated interorganizational collaboration. Additional attention was paid, in the final portion of the interviews, to gender and other social relations of power at play in the process. The focus of the study was limited to the task groups' processes and the time period of March 1995 through to April 1996.

## Researcher perspective

As a Master of Social Work (MSW) student I completed a practicum placement with the restructuring project during the implementation planning phase. The placement

provided the opportunity to observe and participate directly in the task groups' processes. I would describe the endeavor as an intricate dance of collaboration with many partners because the participants involved came together to work toward some shared goals.

The practicum experience piqued my interest in the dynamics that influence interorganizational collaboration. Specifically I am interested in the social relations of power that permeate collaboration. This concern is rooted in my feminist perspective, that is formed, in part, by my gendered life experience as a woman and work experience in shelters with women who have been abused and their children.

As I listened in my work to each woman's story of the violence they survived, patterns of abuse that transcended individual experience emerged. The common thread woven throughout their stories was their lives as women. As Kaschak (1992) observed:

> Each woman leads a particular life determined by her own talents
> and proclivities, her abilities and experiences, her ethnic and class
> membership. Yet all these experiences, I maintain, are organized
> by gender, so that each woman's story is also every woman's story
> (p. 8).

I do not intend to imply that women are a monolithic group. Gender is certainly not the only form of social oppression, rather there are multiple forms that connect and are often analogous.

Neither is feminism a singular concept, nor is it simply an analysis of gender. Feminism emphasizes the plurality of women's experiences. These experiences are influenced by evolving social constructs of race, class, sexuality, ability, and generation of women. The feminist perspective, I espouse, places the complex experiences of women within the larger cultural context - its dominant norms and values. When experience is

viewed within the regnant cultural context, social relations of power become evident.
Social relations of power are asymmetrical in a stratified society. Relations of power are
complicated by many contested and shifting social constructions such as gender.

Complex and fluid power relations permeate all aspects of social engagement.
Asymmetrical relations of power are an inherent, evolving and an unavoidable part of the
present context of interorganizational collaboration. In a stratified society, power
disparities mediate who participates, who is heard, who is valued, and what action is
sanctioned. As a result, I suggest theories and practices of interorganizational
collaboration include critical analysis of social relations of power which influence
collaborative endeavor.

## Study methodology

A qualitative case study was chosen as the method to collect, analyze and report
the data. Qualitative methods acknowledge the influence of the researchers' thoughts and
experiences on the data collection and analysis (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). However, to
minimize the influence of my perspectives on the study, open ended questions were asked
at the beginning of the semi-structured interviews to provide participants ample
opportunity to note their insights and interpretations. The final portion of the interview
allowed me to ask directed questions that focused on issues raised by other
participants and those which aroused my curiosity (i.e., the influence of asymmetrical
relations of power on collaboration).

After the data was collected and analyzed an opportunity was provided for participants in the study to review preliminary data themes. Their interpretations are included in the chapter that describes participants' insights into the process of collaboration.

## Participants' insights

Twenty five participants voiced their experiences of the implementation planning phase of the restructuring project. Most of the participants in this study did not describe the restructuring project as a collaboration. However, participants noted many factors that influence collaborative ability. These factors included environmental turbulence, lack of commonly understood purpose, the influence of the project's facilitator and task group chairs, the affect of vested/self interested participants, time allotted for the collaborative process, perceived predetermined outcomes, mandated or voluntary participation, communication regarding the project and the membership composition of the task groups.

In addition, most of the participants described examples that illustrated the presence of asymmetrical relations of power in the collaboration. These examples included gendered relations, the "old boys network", power relations among ministries, sparse county involvement, desire for more consumer participation and a notion of inclusive community planning.

## Chapter breakdown

The second chapter provides an overview of the literature reviewed on interorganizational collaboration. A definition of collaboration will be offered. Factors thought to influence interorganizational collaboration and the gaps in previous research and the literature reviewed will be noted.

The area of concern and purpose of this study will be discussed in chapter three. Research questions and objectives will be reviewed. The reader will be provided definitions of terms used in this study. In addition, a brief discussion of the implications of the term "consumer" will be offered.

Chapter four will describe the methodology and design of this study. This will include the selection of participants, ethical issues, data collection and method of data analysis. In addition, the limitations of this study will be noted.

The historical context of the restructuring project will be described in chapter five. In chapter six, participants' insights will be shared. Their thoughts include definitions of collaboration, reasons for success and/or failure of the restructuring project as a collaboration, and the factors they found influenced collaborative ability.

Chapter seven will explore participant examples that illustrate asymmetrical relations of power in collaboration. Concluding thoughts on the study will be offered in chapter eight. Social relations of power and areas for further study will be discussed.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

The literature review offers a definition of interorganizational collaboration and an

overview of the factors thought to influence collaboration between organizations. Gaps in

the literature and research on interorganizational collaboration are discussed.

## Interorganizational collaboration

There is no one definition of interorganizational collaboration (see for example,

Himmelman, 1996; Winer & Ray, 1994). However, the following definition encompassed

many of the common characteristics of definitions reviewed. Collaboration is "(1) the

pooling of appreciations and/or tangible resources, e.g., information, money, labor, etc.,

(2) by two or more stakeholders, (3) to solve a set of problems which neither can solve

individually" (Gray, 1985, p. 912). Winer and Ray (1994) describe collaboration as "the

most intense way of working together while still retaining the separate identities of the

organizations involved" (p. 23). The focus of interorganizational collaboration is on a

common area and its issues or problems (Gray, 1989a; Huxham, 1996). In this case study,

the focus was on children's social services. Himmelman (1996) asserts that

interorganizational collaboration is a "'process in which organizations exchange

information, alter activities, share resources, and enhance each other's capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose by sharing risks, responsibilities and rewards'"(p. 22).

Cooperation and coordination differ from interorganizational collaboration. Cooperation links organizations for a temporary period (Mulford & Rogers, 1982; Payne, 1993). Winer and Ray (1994) describe cooperation as "shorter-term informal relations that exist without any clearly defined mission, structure, or planning effort" (p. 22). Cooperation is focused on sharing information between organizations limited to the subject at hand (Winer & Ray, 1994). There is little risk for organizations undertaking cooperative activity, as resources remain separate and each organization retains its autonomy.

Coordination poses greater risk to organizational autonomy. It "requires some planning and division of roles and open communication channels between organizations" (Winer & Ray, 1994, p. 22). It involves staff "from two or more agencies working together to improve services to clients" (Rossi, Gilmartin, & Dayton, 1982, p. 9). Often coordination results in more formal agreements on longer term interactions between organizations (Winer & Ray, 1994). Mulford and Rogers (1982) describe some organizational elements that lend themselves to coordination as: "(1) programs and program development, (2) resources, (3) clients or recipients, and (4) information" (p. 27).

Gray (1989a) summarizes the differences between cooperation and coordination as follows: "coordination refers to formal institutionalized relationships among existing networks of organizations, while cooperation is 'characterized by informal trade-offs and

by attempts to establish reciprocity in the absence of rules" (p. 15). During

interorganizational collaboration, cooperation and coordination often occur (Gray,

1989a).

In the larger socio-political context of government reductions in spending, some

issues may benefit from collaboration between organizations (Himmelman, 1996). As

Murray (1995) asserted:

> Many forces in contemporary society are pressing nonprofit
> organizations to increase the extent to which they cooperate,
> coordinate, collaborate and form partnerships with other
> organizations. Major funders wish to see greater rationalization
> of delivery systems; client groups want smoother integration
> between the various agencies they deal with; and managers see
> collaborative efforts as potential ways to achieve synergy - more
> effective use of their increasingly limited resources (p. 1).

Collaboration may provide an opportunity for a range of participants affected by the

changes in the sector to work together to address the issues, such as government

retrenchment, that concern all members. Gray (1989a) stresses that it is important,

especially during periods of environmental turbulence, that organizations recognize their

interdependence and discover ways to collaborate. Interdependence is realized with

greater ease when there is a shared focus for collaboration.

Each participant brings to the collaboration their unique frame of reference

regarding the key issues. Interorganizational collaboration can provide an opportunity to

"see beyond" individual 'feasibility preoccupations' to other appreciations of the common

concerns (Gray, 1989a). The expected outcome of the collaboration is that the diverse

views and insights of all participants will be woven together to create a larger

understanding of the shared issues (Gray, 1989a).

However, collaboration between organizations is challenging. Woodhouse and

Pengelly (1991) note that interorganizational collaboration "requires a great deal of work

and time; there are no short cuts and quite often collaborative attempts strike hidden reefs

which frustrate the participants and cause disillusionment about future efforts" (p. 1). It is

the 'hidden reefs' or factors that influence the collaboration that need to be examined.

Only in doing so can the waters of collaboration be navigated without the process 'running

a ground.'


**Factors influencing interorganizational collaboration**

The literature reviewed indicated a wide array of factors that are thought to

influence interorganizational collaboration. For example, Wimpfheimer, Bloom, and

Kramer (1990) state that organizational and personal factors affect the process of

collaboration. Gray's (1996) collaboration model cites the larger context, design or

structural form of collaboration, collaborative process, and convening method as elements

that determine the success of the endeavor. Morrison (1996) notes the barriers to

collaboration as: 1) structures and systems; 2) communication; 3) status and perceived

power; 4) professional and organizational priorities; and 5) the extent to which

collaboration is perceived as mutually beneficial. Winer and Ray (1994) also recognize

several factors that affect the collaboration. Their factors are grouped under the following

headings: environment, purpose and resources, process and structure, communication and

membership characteristics (Winer & Ray, 1994). This grouping of factors influencing

collaboration will be used to structure the literature review.

## Environmental factors

Factors related to the environment include the history of collaboration in the

community (Winer & Ray, 1994). If collaboration has occurred previously in the

community and was perceived as successful, that history may positively influence

participation. Moreover, if the cultural norms of the larger community context encourage

collectivism and interdependence, collaboration efforts can be assisted (Gray, 1985;

Sharfman & Gray, 1991; Tjosvold, 1986).

Turbulence and uncertainty within various political and economic contexts, and

reductions in government spending can make collaboration appealing as a method to adapt

to change (Gibelman & Demone, 1991; Gray, 1996; Halpert, 1982; Murray, 1995; Rossi,

Gilmartin & Dayton, 1982; Zuckerman, Kaluzny, & Ricketts, 1995). However, the

anxiety experienced in periods of budget cutbacks and organizational change has a toll that

is expressed in a variety of ways. It is important that any angst created because of

perceived declining resources be contained at a moderate level. For example, if reductions

in government funding are felt to be too large or too sudden then a 'bunker mentality' can

form. This can paralyze organizations' willingness to innovate which is required for

collaboration ( Hines, 1986; Murray, 1995). For individuals, the uncertainty can lead "to a

culture of 'survivalism' in which individual energies are directed inwards toward self-

protection, with little spare energy left to engage with the external world of other

agencies" (Morrison, 1996, p. 131). Anxiety permeates both the individual and the organizational culture and, if not contained, can seriously hinder the collaboration.

Physical proximity is also an environmental factor influencing collaboration. Close geographic proximity of participants can enhance a collaboration as it is likely some informal contacts and a level of interdependence already exist. Research findings suggest that locally conceived initiatives to structure collaboration have an increased rate of success (Gray, 1985).

The importance of the environmental context of interorganizational collaboration cannot be overstated. Bowers Andrews (1990) summarized the influence of context on collaboration:

> The foundation of effective collaboration is its environmental context, which provides the support and sanction necessary to clarify goals and obtain such resources as professional time, space, materials, and information. The interactions of human service organizations occur within a dynamic political economy involving competition among the organizations for limited power and resources (p. 177).

The environmental context should be recognized for the pivotal role it plays in any collaboration.

## Purpose and resource factors

Purpose related factors for successful collaboration, include establishing a shared vision, common purpose, and clear, attainable goals and objectives (Huxham, 1996; Winer & Ray, 1994). A skilled convener is largely responsible for facilitating these factors. The convener needs to be perceived as legitimate by the participants. In some collaborations, a

powerful member is the convener due to the absence of a natural authority (Gray, 1985).

The convener can be from a central funding agency on which many participants are

mutually dependent (Gray, 1985). An effective convener should anticipate resistance to

collaboration and cope with the obstacles that resistance may create (Gray, 1989a;

Schuman, 1996).

The convener shapes membership selection for the collaboration. Appropriate

participant representation in collaboration is necessary. For successful collaboration, the

convener must have wisdom concerning the politics of the sector and the wider

environment within which the results of the venture will be implemented (Gray & Hay,

1986). The central task of the convener is to "introduce a mind set, a vision, a belief in the

creative potential for managing differences, and. . .couple this mind set with a constructive

process for designing creative solutions to complex multiparty problems" (Gray, 1989a, p.

25).

Collaboration requires not only a skilled convener but also other resources such as

sufficient funds (Winer & Ray, 1994). Interorganizational collaboration can be an

expensive process in terms of time and resource commitment. It is necessary to recognize

that while collaboration between agencies may save money in the long term, in the short

term supporting its development requires funds.

**Process and structure factors**

Factors related to the process and structure of collaboration include flexibility,

adaptability, role definition, decision making processes, and the identification of

participants who have a shared interest in the outcome and process (Winer & Ray, 1994). Process factors include the design of meetings for collaboration. Careful consideration needs to be given to processing differences and conflicts among participants so that collaboration is not an exercise in frustration (Gray, 1989a).

In addition, process and structure factors include the mandated or voluntary nature of the collaboration. Holosko and Dunlop (1992) describe voluntary collaboration as the basic premise of interorganizational collaboration. However, Winer and Ray (1994) note that collaboration by mandate can be successful when there are (1) "sufficient resource back up requirements; (2) pre-established goals are broad; (3) local capacity and will is supported; and (4) members of the collaboration can capitalize on and not be constrained by the mandate" (p. 32). Capitalizing on a predetermined mandate can occur when collaboration participants have flexibility in membership, goals, and structure (Winer & Ray, 1994). However, mandated collaboration does not guarantee success or failure, as there are many other factors that influence the process.

**Communication factors**

Frequent and open communication is necessary for successful interorganizational collaboration (Winer & Ray, 1994). Participants should feel they can obtain information, and clarity at different stages of the collaboration. Communication links, both formal and informal, should be established and maintained (Winer & Ray, 1994). This includes knowledge of who has information and the established channels and linkages available to obtain information.

As Barr and Huxham (1996) note, "collaborations involving non-professional community representatives often encounter an additional problem because these people sometimes are not skilled at understanding or articulating what most professional people would regard as non-specialist language" (p. 119). Care needs to be taken when jargon or professional language is used that may contribute to the exclusion of some from participation in the process. Citizens may frame their experiences differently than those in professional capacities as planners and service providers (Aronson, 1993). Therefore, it is important to clarify messages and meanings with participants to promote a common frame of reference and understanding.

**Membership characteristics**

Participants in collaboration activities come to the table with their own personalities. Sink (1996) observes that a major challenge for facilitation of collaboration is "dealing with individual representatives' idiosyncrasies, egos, personal agendas and interpersonal quirkiness" (p. 102). Collaboration can be impeded by participants' resistance to change, institutional mistrust, and historical animosities (Gray, 1989). The resistance to change that often marks participants in collaboration is to be expected. Woodhouse and Pengelly (1991) note that "change threatens established ways of perceiving and understanding and, more fundamentally, it also threatens the identities practitioners and their agencies have found themselves impelled to assume" (p. 235).

The literature reviewed emphasized the importance of giving equal weight and value to organizational and personal membership factors. As Wimpfheimer, Bloom, and Kramer (1990) assert:

> When agencies come together to discuss a possible collaborative effort, they bring with them the history of their respective organizations; their present available resources, personnel and organizational structures; and a future, as set forth in their agencies' philosophies and goals. Likewise, there are parallel personality characteristics of the involved parties: personal histories, current interpersonal styles, and future plans and expectations (p. 90).

All of these variables interplay to affect the whole collaborative process (Wimpfheimer, Bloom, & Kramer, 1990).

Factors related to membership characteristics also include ensuring a cross-section of participants to mirror the components of the issue being addressed (Gray, 1989a; Winer & Ray, 1994). If those who will be effected by the collaboration are not included in the activity, implementation of any recommendations will be difficult.

Moreover, participants need to be perceived as having a legitimate stake and capacity to participate in finding a solution to the problem or issue (Gray, 1985; Gray & Hay, 1986). Gray (1989a) notes that some members of the collaboration are perceived as legitimate because of their recognized expertise in relation to the issue. Other participants may be perceived as legitimate because they control required resources such as information and finances. Similarly, others have the power to effectively veto any agreements reached by the collaboration (Gray, 1985). In addition to legitimacy, participants need to be creative and willing to make compromises (Winer & Ray, 1994).

Creative participants are flexible and open in using both traditional methods and finding

novel ways to address concerns and achieve desired outcomes (Wimpfheimer, Bloom, &

Kramer, 1990).

Furthermore, participants need to view collaboration as being in their own self

interest (Wood & Gray, 1991). Self interest motivates people to participate in

collaboration (Winer & Ray, 1994). Participants need to believe that there will be positive

outcomes from their involvement in collaboration. If there is high recognition of

participant interdependence (that is their self-interest is inextricably linked to the actions of

others in the shared area) then the perceived benefits of collaboration increase (Cropper,

1996; Gray, 1985; Mulford & Rogers, 1982; Tjosvold, 1986).

However, participants do not always recognize their interdependence. Therefore,

the process of collaboration needs to ensure that time and effort are directed to

encouraging participants' understanding of the dimensions of the issue of concern and

how each may be affected (Gray, 1989a; Halpert, 1982). Gray asserts that since

participants can "face the same set of uncertainties about the future, consideration of

alternative scenarios of the future can increase awareness of interdependencies and shape

common visions of expected and desired futures" (1985, p. 921).

Interdependence of participants in collaboration ensures that they have some

power vis-a-vis each other (Gray, 1985). Himmelman (1996) defines power, when used in

relation to collaboration, as the "'capacity to produce intended results'" (p. 22). That

power needs to be dispersed among several members of the collaboration, rather than a

few (Gray, 1985).

However, the dispersement of power is often far easier to advocate for than to

practice. For example, "information is power and sharing it symbolizes some ceding of

autonomy" (Morrison, 1996, p. 130). Moreover, structural power differences cause

unequal distribution of power among collaboration participants. Aronson (1993) asserts

that:

> Consumers of health and social services are in a relatively powerless
> position not only because of their dependence on public resources but,
> further, because the majority of them are from already disadvantaged
> and marginalized social groups (p. 376).

Power differences encountered in interorganizational collaboration are described by

Morrison (1996):

> Differences in contracts of employment, professional training,
> occupational status and power, gender, race, class, language, and
> public image all contribute to the real and felt power differentials
> within the interagency network. Working together means contact
> between differing emotional realities, different systems of meaning
> and different types of bias (p. 130).

Power disparities will be explored further in the following section.

## Gaps in the literature and previous research on interorganizational collaboration

In the literature review, material was found that evaluated the results of

interorganizational collaboration (e.g., Holosko & Dunlop, 1992; Miller & Walmsley-Ault,

1990; Simmons, Salisbury, Kane-Williams, Kauffman, & Quaintance, 1989). In many

cases the collaboration had been deemed unsuccessful. Rogers and Whetten (1982)

recognize that collaborative failures are frequently reported and "attributed to unfulfilled

expectations, conflicting assumptions, and threats to organizational turf"(p. vii).

Woodhouse and Pengelly (1991) assert that in order to understand "why collaboration is so often advocated and so often fails to materialize or breaks down. . .due weight must be given to the divisive implications of this stressful field" (p. 221).

Wood and Gray (1991) concur that more research is needed to analyze the factors which influence interorganizational collaboration. Specifically, the authors assert that there needs to be more study on the role of member interests and how they affect the process (Wood & Gray, 1991). In addition, Sharfman & Gray (1991) acknowledge the need to continue to assess the forces that influence collaboration. Bowers Andrews (1990) adds that more research "is needed to guide collaborative experimentation, to identify those factors that have the greatest impact on service efficiency and effectiveness, and to assess the impact of collaboration on professionals and organizations" (p. 176).

Yin (1993), in a book on case study research, cites the "shallow" literature available in the area of how to make interorganizational partnerships thrive. Murray (1995) agreed that there is continued pressure for interorganizational collaboration in the social services sector "but we need to know much more about what will get the actual process started and what determines its success" (1995, p.8). Gray and Wood (1991) assert that while there is great interest in collaboration among academic and organizational circles the area is still "underdeveloped as a field of study" (p. 4).

In addition, the study of factors that influence collaboration needs to include qualitative methods. Mulford and Rogers (1982) note that the dominant methodology in the study of interorganizational relations is survey research. They argue that it would be advantageous to use qualitative data to augment the results of previous methods. The

authors believe that qualitative data "would greatly increase our understanding of the very complex causal processes underlying exchanges among organizations" (Mulford & Rogers, 1982, p. 120). Qualitative methods can facilitate "context specific understandings" (Henwood & Pedgeon, 1995, p. 10) of collaboration.

Gaps in the literature reviewed also include a lack critical analysis regarding the social relations of power which affect collaboration between organizations and individuals. Most of the authors reviewed subscribed to a functionalist approach toward interorganizational collaboration with little or no attention paid to the social relations of power (e.g., Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996; Cunningham, 1993; Halpert, 1982; O'Looney, 1994; Winer & Ray, 1994). Some authors did not discuss or note power as a factor that influenced collaboration (e.g., Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996; Barr & Huxham, 1996; Bowers Andrews, 1990; Gibelman & Demone, 1991; Halpert, 1982; Mulroy, 1997; O'Looney, 1994; Rossi, Gilmartin & Dayton, 1982; Sink, 1996; Wimpfheimer, Bloom & Kramer, 1990; Winer & Ray, 1994; Zuckerman, Kaluzny & Ricketts, 1995). Others spoke of the self interest of participants in collaboration without linking it to the social relations of power present in the collaborative endeavor (e.g., Finn, 1996; Huxham, 1996; Sharfman & Gray, 1991; Wood & Gray, 1991).

Only a few authors, in the literature reviewed, discussed the dynamics of power in collaboration (e.g., Gray, 1989a; Himmelman, 1996; Morrison, 1996). Morrison (1996) acknowledges many intersections of power differentials. Himmelman (1996) comments on interorganizational collaboration as a tool to transform power disparities in the cultural

context. Yet in the final portion of the article Himmelman (1996) notes 20 steps to keep

in mind when engaged in collaborative endeavor and neglects to mention relations of

power.

Gray (1989a) in her book on collaborating devotes two chapters to power

dynamics in collaboration. The first chapter observes power influences as part of political

dynamics. The next chapter suggests how to cope with the power and politics of

collaboration. Gray (1989a) observes the influence of power dynamics at each stage of

her model of collaboration. However, she does not situate these dynamics within the

larger context as socially constructed relations of power. In fact, in the first chapter of the

book Gray (1989a, p. 10) asserts that "there may be a disparity of power and/or

resources" in interorganizational collaboration processes rather than recognizing power

differences as inherent in all present social relations including collaboration. However,

Gray (1989b) also states that

> noticeably absent from my recent musings about research is a focus
> on power issues, perhaps this reflects my own gradual transformation
> as a woman and a professional and an emerging sense of empowerment
> with respect to both. I suspect, however, that my interest in power
> issues and empowerment is merely dormant at the moment (p. 398).

Gray (1989b) adds that she believes there needs to be more study on the diversity of

members in collaboration and how power differentials affect their participation. Power

disparities based on social constructions of gender categories are also noted as an area for

further study. As Hearn and Parkin (1992) observe, "organizational sociology and

organization theory, like general sociology, have suffered from a neglect of gender issues"

(p. 46).

Another gap in the literature reviewed was the lack of critical analysis of the

assumptions and values of collaboration. Definitions of collaboration suggest that if

participants work together, they can reach optimal shared goals and ends (e.g., Gray,

1985; Gray, 1989a; Himmelman, 1996). Rationality is the assumption underlying the

solution focus of collaboration. Sink (1996) noted that rational behavior is assumed to be

part of interorganizational collaborative process. Rationality is defined as "based on

reasoning or reason; sensible, sane, moderate; not foolish or absurd or extreme" (Pearsall

& Trumble, 1996, p. 1198). An adherence to rationality in collaboration means that

decision making is best achieved by use of the rules of logic to find an optimal solution to

the problem (Checkoway, 1987; Friedmann, 1987; Kiernan, 1982; Lauffer, 1978;

MacGregor, 1995; Rothman & Zald, 1985). Steps in a rational process include:

formulating objectives/goals, listing all alternatives to meet those objectives, evaluating

and selecting the optimal means to attain the goal and implementing the decision.

Friedmann (1987) describes rationality as a recipe that is difficult to apply. Lauffer

(1978) alludes to some of the application challenges when he acknowledges that the

process is not value free as it is often purported to be. Rather it is informed by the

participants' values and assumptions - their ideology, their definition of a "problem" and

their previous experience. As Kiernan (1982) notes "the problem of whether or not to

redevelop an area of deteriorated low-income housing with commercial offices has no

correct or incorrect solution, but clearly would be approached rather differently by a

Marxist than by a free-enterprise conservative"(p. 16). The values and assumptions of what is considered an optimal solution are obscured when concepts of rationality are adhered to.

Unexamined assumptions of rationality in interorganizational collaboration obscure the subjective and political nature of the process and outcomes. The process is not value free. The problem construction and optimal solution rest on a set of value judgements. Rationality assumes a unitary public interest rather than multiple publics and interests. Fraser (1994) and MacGregor (1995) assert that "public" should be conceptualized as "publics" with diverse needs, experiences and yearnings. There are competing, not unitary, notions of the public interest that are "fluid and highly politicized" (Fischer & Karger, 1997, p. 92). The "public" is not as Hendler and MacGregor (1994) note "an amorphous blob of humanity" (p. 105); its political and economic stratification influences participation in collaboration. There is not an equal opportunity for all affected by a common problem to participate in collaboration, yet this is not explicitly recognized in the literature reviewed.

Historically, the unitary public interest tends to reflect hegemonic values and concerns. This has often meant the needs of marginalized groups have been kept on the edges of collaboration processes that will most often intimately affect them because they do not define the issues to be addressed ( Ritzdorf, 1992; Sandercock & Forsyth,

1990). Kiernan (1982) stated with clarity the problems of the concept of unitary public

interest:

> In arguing that there exist general, transcendental interests to
> which nearly everyone can subscribe, the unitary public interest
> ideology implicitly adopts a fundamentally consensual rather
> than conflictive view of society which is itself by no means
> universally shared. . .[The concept of unitary public interest is
> not] merely harmless rhetoric; it actually obscures. . .the crucial
> fact that the benefits and disbenefits of planning interventions
> tend to fall disproportionately upon different socio-economic
> classes and groups (p. 18).

The concept of a unitary public masks the social relations of power in a stratified society.

It is with the preceding literature review and its gaps in mind that the study of

collaboration to restructure children's social services was initiated. This study utilized

qualitative research methods and involved 25 participants who shared their thoughts on

the dynamic factors that influenced the collaboration. The area of concern, purpose of the

study, research questions, study objectives and terms necessary to facilitate understanding

of the historical context of the endeavor will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

## AREA OF CONCERN AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

### Study focus and purpose

This qualitative study focused on a collaborative planning process which addressed decreases in service funding and demands for more effective and efficient provision of social services for children. It is a valuable case to explore because the restructuring of social services is not new nor is it likely to soon be passé. Moreover, collaborative planning processes will continue and participants in future endeavors may benefit from the lessons learned in this case example. This Southwestern Ontario case study involved numerous social service providers, those who accessed the services, government departments, and other community members.

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the process dynamics of the implementation planning phase for restructuring of children's social services in London, Ontario. The dynamics explored with participants included their view of factors that impeded and/or facilitated interorganizational collaboration. In the final portion of the interviews social relations of power were often discussed to determine their influence on collaborative endeavor. The participants' insights may be useful to consider in future restructuring processes undertaken in similar circumstances across the province of Ontario. In addition, the themes of this study may provide some challenges to existing theories and practices of interorganizational collaboration.

## Research questions

- What are the dynamics involved in the collaborative process of the implementation planning phase for restructuring children's social services in London, Ontario?

- What can be learned from this interorganizational collaborative experience?

## Objectives of the research

- To gain an increased understanding of the perceptions of the dynamic process of interorganizational collaboration in the social services sector.

- Gather, analyze, and distribute data that may be of value to those who may be considering facilitating and/or participating in collaboration in the social services sector.

## Terminology

The following definitions of terms are provided to facilitate understanding of the case history and development.  Definitions are based on relevant documents and my experience of the case as a placement student.

**The Coordinating Council for Children and Youth for London and Middlesex (CCCY)**

- consisted of organizations that provided service to children and their families and wished to participate in planning and coordination for the sector.

**The Community Management Committee**

- a group (often referred to as the Committee) convened by CCCY to study and

  develop recommendations for the area of children's social services in London and

  Middlesex. Their report, regarding the restructuring of children's social services,

  was released in March of 1995.

**The Restructuring Project**

- refers to the restructuring of the children's social services sector in London and

  Middlesex as recommended by the Community Management Committee Report.

**The Ministry**

- refers to the London and Area Office of the Ministry of Community and Social

  Services (MCSS). The service catchment of the London Area Office of MCSS

  includes the counties of London-Middlesex, Elgin, Huron, Oxford, Perth and the

  Regional Municipality of Haldimand/Norfolk in the province of Ontario (Canada).

**Project Manager**

- person hired by MCSS to facilitate the implementation planning phase of the

  Restructuring Project.

**The Implementation Planning Phase**

- refers to the planning for implementation phase of the Restructuring Project

  facilitated by the Project Manager. It includes task group formation and processes,

  recommendations for implementation, and development of the final implementation

  plan.

**Stakeholders**

• refers to those affected by the Restructuring Project recommendations. They

include: consumers of children's services (i.e., parents), service providers

(nonprofit and for profit), labor, area/local planning groups, aboriginal peoples and

First Nations (on reserve), child care providers, developmental services, special

needs groups/associations, young offender services, business community, violence

against women services, French language services, cultural communities, faith

communities, the District Health Council, and volunteers (Government of Ontario,

1996a). The stakeholders identified (by MCSS) are from London and surrounding

counties served by the London Area Office of MCSS.

**Implications of the term "consumer" of social services**

I choose to use the term "consumer" despite some of its limitations because it was

part of the terminology of the endeavor and used by the participants in the study.

However, in writing the thesis I have been struck by the inadequacy and problematic

nature of the term "consumer." While critical analysis of the language of the endeavor

could constitute a dissertation by itself, I will briefly note some of my concerns as they

relate to the concept of consumer of social services.

It is important to critically examine the language used in collaboration. Language

and its meaning are not neutral nor value free (Code, 1991; Ehrlich, 1995; Penna &

O'Brien, 1996). When the term "consumer" is used instead of "citizen" it connotes an

entirely different relationship. Beresford (1988) suggests the use of consumer reduces the

rights of citizens to merely purchasers in the market place. Social issues are reframed in terms of market preferences, "consumer rights and product developments, echoing the language and conceptions of the market economy from which they have been borrowed" (Beresford, 1988, p. 38).

If social services and collaborative planning processes adopt business language, without critical reflection on the nature of the work it is being applied to, there may be deleterious effects. It follows that to be consumers, each recipient of services must have an allotment of money or a voucher from the government to use to purchase the service they need from a social service agency. It then becomes the consumers responsibility to meet their needs with the limited funds they have and/or are given. The responsibility of government to intervene, to modify the effect of a market system and a stratified society, is reduced and displaced on the "consumer" - to the individual instead of societal responsibility and obligation. The issue becomes consumer preference not citizen and societal rights and responsibilities.

The business model needs critical examination when applied to the realm of social services. In short, the consumer model does not fit with the history of social services. As

Beresford (1988) asserts:

> Welfare services have never been based on or shaped by a
> straightforward market supply and demand model - whether
> or not modified by state intervention. That is because they
> have rarely represented a straightforward product or service
> that could be seen as the equivalent of other products or
> services. The prevailing model instead has been of the state
> developing services, usually reluctantly because of the
> resources and intervention they involve, to serve particular
> functions, primarily for itself and secondly for its citizens.
> Such functions have been regulatory, custodial, supportive
> and punitive. They have not been determined by their
> recipients but by the prevailing state fears, philosophies and
> requirements."(p. 40).

This brief discussion is not intended to insist that the terminology of consumer is entirely

detrimental in its effect on clients of social services. The notion of a consumer as someone

who has individual needs and preferences is helpful in encouraging the primacy that the

needs of the client should enjoy within the social service sector. However, in attempting

to involve the person receiving services in the sector planning, care should be exercised.

The politics and power of language should be examined. The words used to encourage

and empower people have intended and unintended effects. The terminology used can

serve to further individualize social concerns and obscure the cultural context that created

them.

The preceding information about the study and terms frequently used was provided

to facilitate understanding of chapter four. The next chapter describes the methodology

and design of the study.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

## Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology and design of this study. First, the

decision to pursue a qualitative case study is reviewed. The unit of analysis, selection of

participants, ethical issues, data collection techniques, data analysis and limitations of this

study are described.

## Why a qualitative case study?

As noted in the literature review, there is a need for qualitative study of

interorganizational collaboration. Most influential works on interorganizational relations

have tended to rely on survey methods to collect data (Milner, 1980). The subtle and

complex dynamics and processes of interorganizational collaboration are best understood

when examined in relation to their context. As discussed previously in the literature

review, context is inextricably linked to collaboration as each evolves with the other.

Qualitative studies use data collection techniques such as interviews and participant

observation. Interviews can allow subtleties and nuances of individual meanings ascribed

to experiences to be captured in ways that quantitative methods, such as surveys, do not

afford (O'Neill, 1995). Qualitative data collection methods provide an opportunity to

study the context, complex processes and subtle dynamics involved in interorganizational collaboration.

Moreover, a qualitative approach integrates the knowledge of the researcher as a source of data. As a MSW student who completed a placement requirement at the project under study, I gained intimate knowledge and experience of the processes and dynamics involved in this case of interorganizational collaboration. By utilizing qualitative methods, my understanding, observations, and experience can add another dimension to the data collected and its analysis.

The data was collected, analyzed and reported in the form of a case study. The case study format is "the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context" (Yin, 1993, p. 3). Yin (1993) suggests that interorganizational relations are suited to case study. The reader's understanding of the dynamics involved in the case under study are enhanced by the contextual descriptions that are part of a case study report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is the task group process of the implementation planning phase of the restructuring of children's social services in London, Ontario. The implementation phase began in March of 1995 and continues at the time of writing (June 1997). The task group process begun in March of 1995 and ended in April of 1996 when the implementation recommendations of task groups were submitted to MCSS. Management

of this aspect of the collaboration was undertaken by MCSS and a project manager with whom I completed my student placement.

## Selection of participants

In September of 1996, one hundred and thirty two invitations were faxed or mailed to all participants in the task groups that studied the restructuring recommendations and those who managed this portion of the process (see Appendix A). They were invited to attend focus groups reflective of the task group themes and discuss the process of their respective groups. Potential participants were made aware of the purpose of the study, how the study was to be conducted, data collection methods, confidentiality issues, time required and what would be done with the information. They could decide to accept (or reject) the invitation to participate. All participants who responded to the invitation to participate were interviewed for the study. Participants in the study were all involved indirectly or directly in the task group process of planning for restructuring.

## Ethical issues

To respect the rights and privacy of all participants in the study, several ethical issues were addressed with those involved. First, all participants were informed about my general background as the researcher conducting the study. The name and phone number of my faculty advisor was made available in the event that a complaint about my conduct needed to be made. The purpose and objectives of the study were described and explained to participants (see Appendix A).

Participants were informed that while their name and any other overtly identifying information would not be used in the transcripts nor reports of the study, the geographic location and details of the case would not be disguised. The participants were made aware of the limitations of anonymity. For instance, a reader of the final report may be able to surmise from their understanding of the collaboration the identities of some participants. The limitations of confidentiality were reflected in the consent forms signed by the participants. In addition, study participants knew that they could withdraw their consent to involvement at any time in the course of the study (see Appendix B).

## Data collection techniques

Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews. This form of interview was chosen because it provides an opportunity for discussion and clarification with participants. Reinharz (1992) observed, interviewing "offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (p. 19). Interviews were conducted from October 1996 through January 1997.

Twenty five participants responded to the invitation to be part of the study and they all were interviewed. Although the original invitation was for a focus group, most (twenty one) of the interviews occurred individually. Individual interviews seemed to be preferable for scheduling purposes of participants and assurance of their confidentiality. Each interview lasted, on average, one and one half hours. Four participated in two group interviews which lasted approximately one and one half hours each. Sixteen women and

nine men contributed insights regarding the process they experienced during the period of task group work. The participants represented funding organizations, consumers of social services, and city and county service providers. However, the majority of participants were service providers from London.

The research questions assumed that the planning process for restructuring of children's social services was a collaboration between organizations, governments and individuals. As I asked for the definition of interorganizational collaboration from participants, some noted that interorganizational collaboration was a misnomer as the process included players who were not organizational representatives. If it was a collaboration, it was noted that it should just be called that rather than interorganizational collaboration. After this concern was raised, I began to ask participants in interviews for their definition of collaboration rather than interorganizational collaboration.

Before commencement of each interview, the purpose, process, and confidentiality issues of the study were reviewed and the consent form was signed. Participants were advised, prior to signing consent, that interviews would be taped and notes taken. The interview began with open-ended questions to facilitate participants' thoughts regarding their experience of the task group process and dynamics. Questions included: how they would define collaboration, whether they thought this endeavor was a collaboration, what were the dynamics of the task group process, what factors they felt impeded and/or facilitated collaboration, what they learned from the experience, advice they would give others and any final comments or thoughts.

Directed questions were asked only after participants had ample opportunity to express their views on the process, dynamics and factors that influenced collaboration. This was done to minimize the effect of my biases and interests on participants' responses. The directed questions included: whether the environment (socio-economic and political) had any affect on the collaboration; what role if any did power differentials play; what role if any did gender play; and did the task group have the appropriate membership. Sometimes, during the latter part of the interview, I raised specific examples from processes the participant and I had been involved in, that illustrated social relations of power that the participant may not have noted and asked for their comment on the example. No two interviews were the same as directed questions evolved throughout the data collection process as a result of issues raised by participants. For instance, in the first interviews specific questions did not include the role of gender. I had not asked this question in an attempt to minimize the influence of my biases on the themes found in this study. However, after several interviews in which gender was raised by the participants as a factor, I began to ask others this question in the latter portion of subsequent interviews.

Credibility of the data collected was enhanced by the use of multiple sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1993). In the study, data was contributed by the 25 participant experiences. Supporting documentation such as task group meeting minutes and Ministry documents for historical information and the larger context at the time of the collaboration provided further sources of data. I also drew on my experience of the collaborative planning process, during my placement as an MSW student.

## Data analysis

Data analysis is described by Lincoln & Guba (1985) as simply "a process for 'making sense' of field data" (p. 202). The actions involved in the analysis included unitizing and categorizing the data collected (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Once all the interviews were complete and the transcripts compiled, the material was read, and key themes and data categories noted as they emerged. A file was created for each theme. The transcript data was divided into pieces (units) that were placed in appropriate theme files. The information in each category and file was cross referenced (constant comparison method described by Glazer & Strauss, 1967 and Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and moved around to determine trends, patterns, and mismatching. The data analysis process continued until the categories and files were sufficiently saturated and regularities had emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data analysis and reduce the likelihood of the data collected being misinterpreted, member checks (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Jick, 1979; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were undertaken. Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe member checks as a continuous process, both formal and informal, in which "data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stake holding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (p. 314). The checks, in this study, involved meeting with participants to formally review preliminary themes from the data analysis. All participants were invited to attend the feedback session in May of 1997. Seven participants came to the meeting and contributed their thoughts regarding the preliminary themes of the data collected and

analyzed. Alternative interpretations of the data analysis are presented in the chapter on participants' thoughts on the process.

## Limitations of the study

The study is limited to discussion of the dynamics involved in collaboration in the specific area of planning to restructure children's social services in London, Ontario. Participants' responses can only be understood within their specific context and meaning. Though some of the ideas are transferable for exploration in other similar contexts, the case study is not generalizable in its entirety to other communities. The findings of the case study "like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (Yin, 1989, p. 21). Therefore, the knowledge and insights gleaned from this case study can be considered by similar communities contemplating comparable collaborative endeavors.

Due to my time and resource constraints as a graduate student researcher, the study focused on the time period of March 1995 through to April 1996. This limits the discussion to the task group process of the implementation planning phase of the project. This time line does not allow for an analysis of the dynamics in the historical context preceding this phase of the endeavor. Neither does the study examine the implementation process that followed the task groups.

The next chapter provides a historical context of the collaboration studied. It is hoped that the context will facilitate the reader's understanding of the study themes presented in the data analysis.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

## Introduction

The historical context is provided to augment the reader's understanding of this

study. The history of the planning effort is briefly reviewed. Notation of the role and

product of the Community Management Committee is part of the discussion. A

description of the task group planning process for implementation of the recommendations

to restructure is provided.

## History of the planning effort

The London and Middlesex Coordinating Council on Children and Youth (CCCY)

existed for approximately ten years to plan and coordinate the children's services sector in

the area of London and Middlesex County (Ontario). The membership of CCCY

encompassed predominantly senior level staff from approximately 60 child serving

organizations in the City of London and the County of Middlesex. The mandate of

CCCY included participation in and sponsorship of research studies regarding the

children's social services sector. It was with this mandate in mind, that CCCY passed, in

July of 1993, a resolution to study the scope of children's services in London and

Middlesex (Government of Ontario, 1995).

The study was to focus on two principal objectives: 1) to recommend the range of children's services necessary for the community; and 2) to recommend measures to realize economic efficiencies in the service system (Community Management Committee, 1995a). In October of 1993, CCCY identified a two fold implementation strategy for the study. First, there would be a short-term issues report. This report was to find cost effective methods for serving what was termed "low prognosis, high cost children," (Community Management Committee, 1995a, p.1-1) who were considered "hard to serve" by the Children's Aid Society (CAS) of London-Middlesex and by other agencies and institutions in the area. The second strategy was to develop a longer term report or Business Plan on the possible restructuring of children's services in the City of London and the County of Middlesex (Government of Ontario, 1995). The short term issues report was completed by the Spring of 1994. The second strategy, the Business Plan process, was then initiated.

The primary instigator of the long term planning process was the London Area Office of MCSS. The Ministry suggested CCCY commission a planning process to recommend ways to restructure the children's services. While the impetus behind the examination of restructuring children's social services was not explicitly stated it was initiated for a number of reasons.

In the macro economic context of 1993, although the statistical recession had ended (there had been two consecutive quarters of positive economic growth, as measured by the gross domestic product) the job losses of the recession, which had been structural rather than cyclical, did not return. The relative wealth of the mid and late 1980s in Ontario was over. In that decade, many social services had sprouted in response to

concerns expressed and interests represented. Money had been allocated to fund the services with relative freedom and little planning necessary to create a system of coordinated and complimentary social services (Hines, 1986). The result was a patchwork of services that often did not coordinate nor collaborate together (Hines, 1986). Recipients of social services for children had raised concerns regarding services being difficult to access, uncoordinated and not meeting their needs (Government of Ontario, 1995).

The problem of little coordination and collaboration in the children's social service sector was not surprising. Historically, social services have not been managed as a system of services but rather as service pockets with separate funders and funding formulas. The services provided to children have been managed by several ministries, for example; MCSS, Health, Education and Housing. Each ministry has its own objectives, funding formulas, and legislative requirements that guide and inform its work. Coordination across ministries, in planning and service delivery, has not been of primary concern. The result has been a service sector split into silos - not a managed system - which has meant a generally uncoordinated response to the needs of children and their families (Hines 1986; Teram & Hines, 1988).

## The Community Management Committee

It is within this historical context that the planning endeavor was initiated. CCCY assembled a 14 person Community Management Committee. The Committee was to be compromised of London and Middlesex County citizens, without vested interest in

children's social services.    A consultant assisted the work of the Committee.  The

planning task of the Committee was defined by CCCY and MCSS.

The purpose of the Committee was to develop a Business Plan for the

restructuring of children's services for London and Middlesex.  The objectives of the

planning process included the following: "a) to identify the envelope of government and

voluntary financial resources spent on children's services in London and Middlesex; b) to

recommend an appropriate range and mix of services across prevention, treatment,

protection and secure care; and c) to identify innovative, effective and less costly

approaches for the governance, administration, organization, support services and direct

delivery of those services" (Government of Ontario, 1995, p. 3).

The expected outcome of the planning process was a Business Plan that would

provide funders of children's social services with specific, implementable

recommendations for restructuring that would serve as a guide for their decision making

(Government of Ontario, 1995).  The geographic scope of the planning recommendations

was not to exceed the City of London and the County of Middlesex.  Twelve children's

social service agencies, all London based, were identified and agreed to be part of the

planning focus.

The Committee met from June of 1994 through February of 1995.  During this

time they educated themselves on the service system, researched the agencies in the

planning study and entertained a variety of options to restructure children's social

services.  The final planning recommendations for restructuring, generated by the

Committee, were based on the following criteria:

> to establish the well being of the child as the highest priority of the
> Province and the community in the distribution and use of its resources;
> to focus children's services planning and delivery on the child;
> to provide access for all children to appropriate services;
> to make available a choice of services within a continuum of care;
> to increase support to services that reduce the need for remedial action;
> to use the service approach that is the least intrusive where remedial action
> is required;
> and to provide services on a more integrated basis, with
> an improved entry process for accessing services
> (Government of Ontario, 1995, p. 5).

The recommendations of the Committee are noted in the following section.

## Committee recommendations for restructuring

In March of 1995, the Committee released its Business Plan with draft

recommendations for the restructuring of the children's services sector.  The major

planning recommendations were as follows: 1) development of a single point of access to

a system of necessary services; 2) ability for funding to follow the child (across ministries,

systems, areas) to purchase services required rather than funding solely reaching the child

indirectly via an agency core budget from MCSS; 3) creation of a Prevention Council to

manage funds specifically for prevention initiatives in the community; 4) development of

an integrated emergency services strategy for the sector;  5) divestment of the $2.5 million

provided by MCSS to the London Psychiatric Hospital for adolescent emergency services

to community based services; 6) the Child and Parent Resource Institute (CPRI) cease to

be directly operated by MCSS and become a community based transfer agency that

services only the MCSS London Area Office, not a regional expanse; and 7) London and

Middlesex Children's Aid Society divest its five group homes to agencies within the

community, release their reserved beds in other facilities for access through a single point

and focus on the core services within their mandate (Community Management Committee,

1995a; Government of Ontario, 1995).

These recommendations had considerable implications for the sector and

challenged the status quo of children's social services. The 12 agencies studied by the

Committee served a geographic area that was larger than the mandate of the Committee.

The Committee recommended that their plan apply to the area served by the London Area

Office of MCSS which includes one city and six counties. However, five of the counties

effected by the recommendations had not been included in the planning process, as the

scope was to be limited to the City of London and the County of Middlesex.

Representatives of the labor groups that would be affected, by recommendations

for service divestment, were not involved in the planning process despite the repercussions

of the recommendations on the staff (Government of Ontario, 1995). In addition, service

providers in the young offender portion of the children's services system were frustrated

because their unique service challenges had not been understood by the Committee and

therefore not reflected appropriately in the subsequent restructuring recommendations

(Community Management Committee, 1995b).

As a result of these concerns, funding agencies, union representatives, boards of

education, health planners, consumers, staff, county service providers who were not part

of the planning process, and the original 12 agencies studied, responded formally to the

planning recommendations of the Committee. The written submissions to the Committee

in response to the draft Business Plan were compiled and distributed to those involved or

interested in the process. However, the Business Plan and its recommendations were not

revised by the Community Management Committee.

## Implementation planning process - task groups

The implementation plan for the recommendations was not part of the mandate of

the Committee. A process to plan for implementation was devised after the Committee

produced their report with planning recommendations in March 1995. A Project Manager

was retained by MCSS to lead the process of planning for implementation. Task groups

were formed to focus on each of the principal recommendations of the Business Plan. The

mandate of the task groups was defined by MCSS. Each group was expected to develop a

draft implementation plan for each of the main planning recommendations. The task

groups were as follows: single point access, funding flowing with the child, integrated

emergency services, prevention, collaboration and respite care.

The Ministry defined the stakeholders necessary for the task groups. Most task

groups did have a cross-section of stakeholders although the diversity was limited and

skewed in favor of a majority of service providers from London based agencies. There

were only a smattering of county service providers involved in the endeavor. This may be

due to their initial exclusion and lack of clarity regarding the implementation area of the

planning recommendations.

A handful of consumers participated in the task groups, representing primarily

parents of children with developmental (physical and/or mental) needs. They were often

middle class individuals, with professional education and work backgrounds. The factors that may have kept other consumers from the table will be discussed later, when examining their participation in planning processes.

The work of the task groups was time limited. Many groups met from January until April of 1996. In April of 1996 each task group forwarded its plan for implementation to MCSS. The Ministry released their plan for children's services in August of 1996. The plan itemized what recommendations they would consider and what they would implement. The Children's Services Plan of MCSS (also referred to as the Ministry Plan) indicated that not all of the initial Committees' recommendations would be implemented. I observed that the action sanctioned and the time lines for the implementation of adopted recommendations frustrated some of the original Committee and several of the task group participants.

No formal evaluation of the planning process had been completed at the time of writing (June 1997). However, plans do exist to evaluate the Ministry's Plan and its outcomes after implementation has occurred. The time for full implementation, dependent on the recommendation, is three to ten years (Government of Ontario, 1996b).

It is within this historical context that the thoughts of participants in the collaboration will be discussed. I have likened their experience, in the restructuring process, to a dance with many partners and therefore many challenges.

# CHAPTER SIX

## - DANCERS SPEAK -

## THE PARTICIPANTS THOUGHTS ON THE PROCESS

### Introduction

I spoke with 25 of over a 100 partners involved in the collaborative dance of planning to restructure children's social services. It is their voices that will be reflected in the pages that follow. Their experiences, struggles, ability and lessons learnt. A privilege to interview and a joy to engage. The dancers speak.

### Collaboration

Critical to any dance is a shared understanding between the partners involved as to what the dance is to entail, their role, the steps they need to take, and the expected outcome. There is a significant difference between the steps, manner and involvement in a tango and a waltz. If one partner in the dance believes they are there to participate in a waltz and the other is there to partner in a tango then you have a collection of stubbed toes, twisted ankles, possibly giggles, maybe disappointment and probably frustrated dancers who may decide not to be partners at all. Collaboration is similar. There needs to be a shared definition of collaboration as it influences what is sought in the interaction.

Generally the first question in the interview process asked the participant how they defined collaboration. The responses had several common themes. Most definitions

included specific criteria that were necessary for it to be collaboration rather than the

appearance thereof. For instance, collaboration had to involve giving up some power and

resources. A participant asserted:

> *It's the notion of mutually enhancing each other's capacities to achieve commonly agreed upon goals. Embedded in that is the notion that the most important thing is that the goals are common and that your interest is in enhancing each other's capacity not just in preserving and maintaining your own interests - this notion of giving up as well as taking.*

Another participant succinctly summed up that collaboration was:

> *Giving up a little, pooling it together, and making a lot.*

Others noted:

> *for true collaboration you have to have a consultative process where every voice is heard - where there is an ability to hear and share power.*

> *[Collaboration is] sharing of power and resources between agencies . . . An unnatural act with unconsenting adults.*

> *Interorganizational collaboration is when several organizations get together and decide to work together. . . .working together is different than just sharing information. . . .they commit themselves to the outcome and to implementing the outcome of that collaboration.*

> *A group of people working together toward an end.*

> *In its simplest terms it is working together for some common goals and objectives, some agreed upon outcomes - I think that's pretty simple.*

Most participants viewed collaboration as a process of working together to try to attain

the goal, objective, outcome or shared end. A few participants identified that the goal or

outcome had to be achieved for there to have been collaboration. This view held a

collaborative product rather than a collaborative process as the definition.

When asked to comment on whether the endeavor (the task group) of which they

had been a part had been a collaboration many participants felt it had not. Many reasons

were given for why the endeavor was not a collaboration. The following table includes a

summary of participants responses (not in any particular order) to the lack of achievement

of collaboration.

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**Why collaboration was not achieved . . .**

- power exercises came into play
- players were there for the wrong motivations such as organizational survival and self interest
- not everyone understood the issues or agreed with the solution proposed
- there was not enough time to create collaboration
- the process proceeded too slowly
- participants didn't have control over options to solve the problem
- there was not an operational model at the end of the process
- not every voice was heard
- it was a traumatic process
- it did not produce an outcome
- the process did not solve the problems identified
- participants were not energized because no potential solutions were found
- solutions did not get put into place during the process
- the process created some more suspicious, less trusting and damaged relationships
- there was no clear dialogue among members
- it did not include the community who formed the first report
- some participants felt disillusioned and disenfranchised
- agencies and services did not amalgamate
- there was not enough inter-ministerial membership in the task groups

Some participants viewed the endeavor as a successful collaboration in the aspects noted (not in any particular order) in the following table.

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**Why collaboration was successful . . .**

- people came to work together
- members of the task groups were creative
- there was a high participation level in the task group process
- some participants felt enriched by the process because it provided an opportunity to learn
- problems, that needed to be addressed, were identified as a result of the task groups
- there were indirect outcomes of the process, such as dialogue and interaction with others
- at the end of the task group process members were talking about the community not their specific agencies
- some common ground was reached
- there will be more willingness, as a result of the task group process, to work together in the future
- in the meeting with participants to review the preliminary findings it was noted that the collaboration was successful because task group reports and recommendations were used by the Ministry and will be implemented. It was also noted in the same session that the outcome of the task group process had not been decided in advance so there was room for the input to be included in the Ministry's plan for children's social services

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As a participant noted in the feedback session on the preliminary themes, many of the comments about successful collaboration reflect on the process rather than the outcome.

It was asserted that members would probably not have been involved in the task groups if they did not expect an outcome from the process.

However, at the feedback session, a few participants asserted that although not all the desired outcomes of the planning process had been achieved, several were in the process of implementation. In addition, a few participants felt it important to note that the parameters of the task groups did not include implementation of the recommendations.

Rather the task groups were to examine the recommendation and provide a plan for implementation, leaving the Ministry to decide what it would implement.

In the definitions noted, many participants observed the challenge and tension of task and process needs in collaboration. However, when evaluating whether the endeavor was successful, the measure moved for many to be the outcome, the ends that they wished for, with little recognition of a collaborative process. In the end, it appears that when participants weighed the successes, the process took a "back seat" to the attainment of the desired goals of the collaboration.

Some participants noted the importance of recognizing small examples of collaboration rather than limiting the definition to only agency mergers and amalgamations. Several participants asserted that collaboration should be seen as a philosophy - a way of working together. Moreover, a couple of participants recognized the need to view collaborative change as evolutionary rather than an overnight process. Collaboration, it was asserted, requires patience and understanding of the challenges that threaten to undermine the process.

Although many participants described the collaboration as unsuccessful, in terms of the outcome, several expressed their willingness to be part of another collaborative project. When asked to give general advice to others considering participating in collaboration some participants said the following:

> *Do it. There are all kinds of things to be learned. There are*
> *things to be learned about how organizations in general*
> *interact - there are things to be learned about how our*
> *organizations in specific interact - there are things to be*
> *learned like skills and also there are things to be accomplished.*

*[Collaboration] will be somewhat turbulent and not all hugs
and kisses.*

*[The exercise is about] constructive anarchy and I don't think
that is a bad place to be if you can tolerate it.*

*The process is tough but I still believe it is a way of achieving
change. . . .I don't give up on it. Every new interorganizational
collaboration I love being there because there is always
something new you are going to learn. I think it really enriches
people.*

Most of the responses by participants encouraged others to participate in collaboration

because of its challenges and benefits.

## Factors effecting collaboration

Participants described many factors that effected the collaboration. These included

power differentials (which will be discussed in the next chapter), the environmental

context, lack of common purpose, role of facilitator and task group chairs, time allocated

to collaboration, mandated or voluntary structure, communication, self interest and

composition of the task group. To address these factors, participants made

recommendations for future endeavors. Recommendations included the marketing of the

benefits of collaboration, illustrating small successes throughout the process, closed

membership and mandated participation to achieve the goal of the collaboration. These

factors and recommendations will be discussed in the following section.

**Environmental context**

Participants noted that environmental issues at the time of the task group process included a new provincial government that implemented its first round of cuts in funding to social services, health care, and education just prior to and during the task group process. The majority of participants credited these environmental factors for significant impact on the collaboration. Some participants observed a predatory environment that fostered an increased lack of trust among social service agencies as a result of the politics of retrenchment in the sector. One participant asserted:

> *One of the elements of the context is continuous budget cuts over a number of years, pressure on agencies to amalgamate or close out certain kinds of services - what that led to is a number of agencies sort of circling looking for a piece they can pick off - there's a certain predatory aspect to that - hoping somebody is going to go belly up. . . .It's a very strange feeling because there are a lot of us here in London who have worked for several different agencies over the years . . . so in some sense there's a family feeling to this but also disorienting and distressing in some ways.*

Another participant reiterated:

> *You're in a time of tremendous change, programs have just been axed, you don't know who is next - I mean last winter was a tremendously stressful time and continues to be for a lot of people. . . so everybody is waiting to see who will still be around. . . .[they wanted] to collaborate and respond to the downsizing and still meet the needs of their client population but also instincts set in and you think about your own survival, of course you do. We have a government that is basically telling you to be dog eat dog and then asks you to go and participate in collaboration processes - it is a little bit crazy making - I mean you have a government that is basically telling you to be cut-throat with one another then asking you to go and collaborate in a process.*

These participants found the predatory nature of the environment caused some members

involved in the restructuring process to be suspicious and mistrustful.

Some participants observed the fear, anxiety and panic created by job loss, fear of

organizational death, and expectations of further fiscal cuts to social programs. One

participant asserted:

> *Post election. . .[and] even before that there was a period of time*
> *when people were feeling very uncertain about what the future*
> *would hold so there were already some shifts within the service*
> *system - various service systems - certainly social services, health*
> *and education. But the ambiguity was heightened and pushed by*
> *a kind of panic after the election of the Conservative government*
> *and the cuts that followed so dramatically. That really panicked*
> *people and probably was pretty influential in driving them to the*
> *table. Now that may have also worked to quite seriously*
> *compromise anything that may have come closer to real*
> *collaboration. Because other agendas are heightened in that and*
> *preservation of the organization becomes a priority. So people*
> *start looking for mergers, amalgamations, friendly take overs,*
> *unfriendly take overs, what can we do to save ourselves.*

However, several participants asserted that the apparent resource crisis, fiscal cut backs by

federal and provincial governments, stress, fear, angst and "shake down" in the sector

produced the "critical mass" necessary to "drive" the collaboration.

It was asserted that if participants do not become immobilized by their fear then

the crisis environment can provide the impetus for collaboration and change. One

participant stated:

> *I think that the environment can create the motivation. If your*
> *survival is threatened you're going to learn how to collaborate*
> *rather quickly if that's your means of survival. So I guess it*
> *depends on how badly the environment is either positively or*
> *negatively effecting you and if there isn't the motivation then*
> *there very often isn't the collaboration. I think the environment*
> *has set up some motivation for a lot of people.*

Another participant reiterated:

> *People will not collaborate until they are forced under pain or*
> *they are experiencing pain as a result of all this erosion [of*
> *social services] then they will start to collaborate because to*
> *not collaborate would create more pain. . . .I think in good*
> *times there is. . .absolutely less collaboration because*
> *everybody can be firmly entrenched in their little silo.*

The participants who recognized the motivation the environmental context provided also

understood the challenges it created for the process. They did not suggest an either/or

scenario which would posit the context as entirely negative or completely positive for

collaboration. Rather, those participants recognized both the benefits and challenges the

environment created.

Notably, one participant asserted that service providers, as a result of the

environmental changes, began to understand the perspective of parents who may feel

overwhelmed regarding the issues of their child. This participant suggested that:

> *more and more people are actually experientially understanding*
> *what it's like to be overwhelmed as a parent is overwhelmed,*
> *which is basically brought to your knees, not just feeling you*
> *have had a rough day but brought to your knees and feeling like*
> *you might not be able to get up again and actually then*
> *partnering with parents on a different level. You are both on*
> *your knees. It isn't a matter of trying to even elevate the parent*
> *to your status anymore its like drop down on your knees and*
> *saying 'help me, you know and tell me what it is you want from*
> *me and tell me how I can be helpful - what can we do together?'*

I suggest that caution should be taken with assertions that fiscal crisis in an organization can cause a provider to relate more intimately with a consumer of social services. This participant suggested that the status difference between a consumer and service provider had been equalized by the desperation and overwhelmed feelings of providers in the wake of cuts of social services. There is a subtle implication, by the participant, that service providers and consumers, as a result of the economic climate, are now on the same level in terms of power and efficacy in terms of control of their environment. This notion can be challenged as power disparities are ever present despite funding cuts to services. Service providers and agencies remain more powerful than consumers within the social service system. Care needs to be taken not to lose sight of the social relations of power that are always present between and within the two groups of service providers and consumers. Asymmetrical relations of power will be discussed in chapter eight.

**Purpose and resource factors**

Several participants observed there was not a common understanding of the purpose of the task groups. Some members thought they were there to implement the recommendations they were studying. Others thought that the purpose was to create alternatives to the recommendations and still others understood the purpose to be the creation of a step by step plan to implement the recommendations. Many participants described the task group purpose as ambiguous and in need of focus, something that inhibited their desire and ability to collaborate. In addition, some suggested that not all members in the task group shared the belief that the social service system needed to be changed by the restructuring endeavor.

In relation to the resources for the collaboration, the facilitator (the Project Manager role) for the process was considered helpful by most participants. The facilitator was considered effective because the person knew the community and had credibility with many members of the task groups. Additionally, those participants noted that the Project Manager played an important role in encouraging collaboration by recognizing and diffusing fears and other emotional responses encountered in the change process. The facilitator was considered by a few participants to be crucial to successful collaboration.

One participant described the role of an effective facilitator as the following:

> *I don't think that it's leadership. Leadership is sort of like being a*
> *champion of a cause. . . .I think it's more like convening a good*
> *Christmas dinner or family dinner. . .I think there is some of it that*
> *is atmospheric, that is supporting people. . .in what they are doing,*
> *knowing that. . .[the] ability to support that enough may be limited*
> *and that there are limits on what. . .[people] are able to do. . . .[It is]*
> *. . .nurturing and supporting goodwill.*

Most participants recommended a facilitator role to encourage and move collaboration toward the desired ends.

However, many participants argued that the position of the Project Manager should have been more clearly identified with or separated from the Ministry. It was asserted that the ambiguity regarding the Project Manager relationship with the Area Office, and the apparent lack of delegated power and authority from the Ministry, was inhibiting the collaboration. It was recommended that the facilitator of the collaboration have requisite delegated authority to complete tasks. One participant argued that outside consultants should be hired (not associated with the Ministry) to facilitate collaborative community planning. Yet others argued that the facilitator needed to be known within the community and have local credibility. In addition, it was recommended, by a few participants, that the role of facilitator should include more assertive marketing of collaboration to the community.

Some participants wanted the facilitator to be more directive regarding the form and nature of the task groups' work and product. Only a few were happy with the freedom the facilitator provided in the boundaries of the frame of reference for the task groups' work. This is not too surprising, given the anxiety that can arise with ambiguity

and responsibility in collaborative processes. As one participant noted, it may have been

easier, for members of the task groups to hold the Project Manager and the Ministry

responsible for the problems of task groups if they had been more directly involved.

However, when this theme was discussed in the feedback session, one participant noted

that the desire for more direction was not about difficulty with ambiguity but about the

necessity of someone - preferably the Ministry - to take a lead role in the arena of change

management.

In addition to the role of Project Manager, many participants asserted that the

chairs of the task groups had a large influence on the process of the collaboration. One

participant noted:

> *You need a good chair. . .[and] make sure that the chair of that*
> *group really understands what they are getting into and allows*
> *every person around that table to speak their own mind - not*
> *assume that you have got group consensus, [and] also agree*
> *that you may never get group consensus around issues but maybe*
> *what you will get is agreement to go forward or at least to go to*
> *the next step.*

These participants observed that the chairs facilitated collaboration when they recognized

the emotions and concerns that can arise during a change process. A participant observed:

> *Change is an emotional issue, very emotional and it is very hard*
> *for those in the group to remove the emotion from the issue.*
> *So if you accept the fact that eighty per cent of the time we as*
> *human beings operate out of our subconscious. . . the role of*
> *the facilitator or chair is to bring to the conscious level those*
> *fears and the subconscious issues that are driving the planning*
> *process.*

Participants noted that collaboration was enhanced when the chairs of the task groups

developed and maintained a common focus, shared language and common understanding

of the intent of the task groups among participants. Collaboration was facilitated when

the chairs kept all the necessary players at the table and worked actively to moderate the

influence of power differences within the group membership.

## Process and structure factors

Some participants asserted that the time allocated to the collaboration process was

too short. Collaboration, they argued, is a lengthy process and requires development of

relationships of trust among members. At the same time, some participants maintained

that the overall process from the Committee work through to the implementation stage

was too long. As a result, the collaboration lost its momentum over time. Illustration of

concrete changes and celebration of small examples of collaborative successes, during the

long process, were recommended. As one participant asserted:

> *People need to see that it can be done, that it is being done so
> that they can instead of being doubters - that it can't ever be
> done or it's too massive and I don't know where to start - look
> at some examples of people who have started and who have
> met with some successes.*

It was recommended that the structure of collaborative endeavor encourage achieving

outcomes in "chewable chunks." Some participants felt that if the restructuring project

was broken down into more manageable elements the collaboration outcomes would have

been easier to accomplish. They asserted that beginning with small projects would

provide examples of the ability of members to collaborate and possibly motivate further

collaborative work. As one participant noted, the "process doesn't need to come to full

closure before we demonstrate how [collaboration] happens."

However, several participants believed the collaboration was compromised in its

effectiveness because it was constrained by the recommendations of a flawed original plan.

One participant asserted:

> *The business plan did not talk to anybody unless you lived in*
> *London/Middlesex and yet came out to be this plan for the whole*
> *area. The business plan was put together by a group of*
> *individuals who are very consumer based in terms of their*
> *experience who didn't have a strong system background to draw*
> *upon. They created a plan that was in my mind un-researched*
> *and untested in terms of its ability to be implemented. And that*
> *same plan and that same group of individuals are still lobbying*
> *the government to implement a plan that has no foundation. . .*
> *So now we've taken that plan and we've created task forces on*
> *it and have tried to move forward on some of the directions.*
> *And when there is no movement there is criticism of the Ministry*
> *because the Ministry can't move it forward. Let's go back to*
> *square one and find out whether any of those ideas have any*
> *connection to reality.*

The participants, who expressed the above sentiment, observed that the Community

Management Committee had not been clear on the county role, involvement, and impact,

left out the young offenders system, and did not work with service providers (especially

county providers and county consumers) to produce the recommendations.

In addition, many participants felt collaboration was inhibited by the appearance of

final decisions having already been made. As the following participant observed:

> *There was anxiety about whether the task groups were more*
> *window dressing rather than any kind of a commitment to really*
> *take a close look and figure out what is implementable. Now I*
> *personally think that it wasn't window dressing. . . .So I didn't*
> *have those anxieties [but] . . .the message I think a lot of people*
> *were getting from the original Committee members [was] 'this*
> *is the way it's going to get done - now do it!'*

In the feedback discussion one participant observed that the perception of the recommendations and outcome as "a done deal" was an issue because of the stage of the collaborative process. It was the implementation phase which is a stage in which the process is more directive and specific to already determined outcomes.

However, those participants who noted the effect of a perceived done deal observed that it led to apathy, paranoia, and distrust among some members of the task group. One participant asserted:

*A certain amount of institutional paranoia [in this process] is pretty easy to come by . . . I think it comes from a realistic notion that people are talking to one another outside of this room and this is a subset of other conversations and so some of the people in the room felt disenfranchised and excluded by the whole process because they recognized that something else was going on or at least what was going on didn't include them anymore.*

When this distrust was discussed at the feedback meeting some participants disagreed. One participant noted that processes occur inside and outside of meeting rooms all the time. It does not mean that deals are being made without including all, rather it is about discussing strategies with those who share similar opinions to yourself, which is inherent to the political nature of organizational relations. Another participant, in the feedback session, noted the effect of the environmental context on participant levels of distrust and paranoia regarding the process and outcomes.

Several participants asserted that the mandating of collaborative process and product (in this case by the Ministry) would have facilitated collaboration. If members did not participate and contribute to attainment of the determined goals there would be

reprisal from the Ministry such as funding cuts.   As one participant noted:

> *My experience thus far has not been that people collaborate*
> *because they know it is the right thing to do.  They collaborate*
> *because, for whatever reason, they are forced to and that's not*
> *necessarily a negative thing that they are forced.*

Another participant asserted:

> *They are not going to change if they don't have to.  They will*
> *look for every excuse in the book for why they should maintain*
> *the status quo.  They are comfortable.  They don't like change.*
> *Everything is running smoothly, why rock the boat. . . .My*
> *thought is that unless collaboration is tied up with funding*
> *you're not going to get true collaboration.*

A third participant argued:

> *either the government is going to say 'ok from now on this is the*
> *way you are going to do things or certain things will get legislated'*
> *. . . when you're pushed into it or forced into it then you have to*
> *work on how are we going to . . . make things work or it is going*
> *to be imposed.*

Another participant stated:

> *I think the Ministry needed to take a stronger role in making people*
> *do this - it's like they're waiting for people to give it up and people*
> *aren't [going to].*

However, a few participants disagreed and asserted that collaboration not be mandated.

There should be voluntary participation in collaborative planning processes.  If it is not

voluntary then the outcomes will not last because members were not willing to participate

in the first place. As one participant observed:

> *When you bring people to the table with a sense of defense as*
> *opposed to out of a sense of what they might accomplish then*
> *you create a whole bunch of different incentives. They are*
> *going to ditch the partnership as soon as they are able.*
> *People that are brought to the table in real partnership want*
> *to do it. They are not at the table because they are forced to*
> *do it, or cajoled, or their funder implied that it would be good*
> *if they did x, y, and z. Those people will only participate as*
> *far as they have to. They won't breath the spirit of the*
> *partnership. . . .[mandated collaboration] will never last. No,*
> *if you bring a partner to the table in a way that they are doing*
> *it out of a sense that they have to, the first time you turn away*
> *from it or are not supervising it they won't be there because*
> *they weren't interested in the first place. You force somebody*
> *to do something and they won't ever buy in.*

This does not, however, mean that there should be no incentives to collaborate. The

participant asserted that it is necessary to "sell" collaboration as an opportunity for

agencies and individuals and motivate them through informal and formal incentives to take

part. As a few other participants stated, an alternative to mandated collaboration is one

with incentives that anchor it - an enlightened self interest that focuses on the opportunity

the collaboration provides. In addition, a couple of participants recommended that

whether the structure was mandated or not there needed to be an evaluation component

built into the process in the form of outcome measurements and participant feedback on

the collaborative endeavor.

**Communication issues**

Several participants noted the importance of the Ministry communicating clear messages about the planning effort internally and externally as a way to address some participants' feelings of mistrust. However, it was argued, by several participants, that the communications about the restructuring project were not clear or consistent. An example of the lack of clarity is found in the role of the counties. Some members of the Ministry told participants that the counties were to have their own planning process and others told them that the counties would be included in this implementation planning process. This was felt to cause participants to have variant views of the process and expected outcomes. Several participants recognized that communication was difficult within and outside of the task groups. As one participant observed:

> *Communication is the most difficult thing to do and do well, you*
> *never met everybody's needs. People only read what they want*
> *to read or hear what they want to hear.*

To address the difficulties of communication some participants suggested repeated and simple messages. One participant stated:

> *It's like giving a bad message of necessity to anybody like within*
> *a family 'grandma is sick and she is going to die' and to go on*
> *giving that message in one form or another so that there can't be*
> *denial of the reality that is staring everybody in the face and*
> *everybody has to somehow own that and be part of that and*
> *claim some of their responsibility as to how they respond, how*
> *they gather around and that didn't happen.*

Some participants asserted that this did not occur nor were the benefits of collaboration marketed. As one participant asserted:

> *I don't think it was sold. I don't think it was sold to people with
> an understanding of their own particular organizational needs
> and dynamics. We didn't get the buy in from people who could
> drive the process through values as opposed to letting it get
> bogged down in the how.*

### Influence of self interested task group members

Many participants believed that self interest, the individual/organizational agendas, detracted from the task groups' focus and goal. It was asserted that task group members' self interest sometimes formed "blinders" to alternative ideas and solutions to the issues under examination. Several participants argued that the collaboration was inhibited by too many executive directors of agencies as members of the task groups. They thought executive directors inhibited collaborative process because they were too focused on protection of their organizations' jobs and representation of their services. One participant stated:

> *No matter how hard executive directors try to get out of their role
> as executive directors they really can't. Whenever you're looking
> at that pot of money their pay cheque is involved in that as is the
> pay cheque of the employees that they feel a great deal of loyalty
> to and so it is very difficult for them no matter how altruistic they
> try to be, to really [collaborate].*

Another participant asserted:

> *It's very hard to get people to do things when it is their own jobs,
> their own agencies, their own personal commitments are too deep
> and I think we are expecting a lot of people.*

However, as one participant asserted:

> *There is an inherent tension, which is not necessarily bad, I think
> its part of life, between representing one's own organization and
> interests and being part of a broader system where collaboration
> is essential and that will probably always be the case. We may
> be fooling ourselves to think that the world's going to be like a
> garden of Eden . . . My view of the real world is that one has got
> to accept the posturing, accept the advocacy role, and accept
> that people are doing a good job when they represent their
> agencies and their own particular interests and that's balanced
> by the true intent to collaborate and do things on behalf of kids.*

Several participants did recognize the role of self interest in reaching the task groups'

goals.  One participant observed:

> *I think people will look at collaborating, more often than not,
> when they really see that it is in their best interest to - the best
> interests of their clients or the best interest of their organization
> . . . .I think anybody that's going to be involved in a process,
> that is going to look at doing something differently, has to have
> a vested interest at some level or they wouldn't be at the. . .table.*

Another participant added:

> *everybody should be a fanatic for their own cause and that will
> bring the issues to the table*

These participants asserted that all come to the table because of self and/or organizational

interests.  Collaboration, they noted, is a matter of mobilizing that motivation toward

achievement of the common goals.

## Task group composition

Several participants recognized that the attitudes of the task groups' members

influenced the collaboration.  Some of these participants asserted that some service

providers appeared to not take collaboration seriously but viewed it as a temporary fad

that they could "ride out." As one participant observed:

> *You would have to over time come to the notion. . .that the tune*
> *changes and just wait it out. Right now it's collaboration and*
> *cooperation. . . .There was a mild sneeze at outcomes a couple of*
> *years ago, collaboration/cooperation has been kicking around for*
> *five or six years, we had client driven models before that,*
> *wraparound is the next great wave. . . .it's like surfing almost.*
> *There will be another wave along shortly. You might have to*
> *paddle in with one of them in some small way but if it's not the*
> *wave you want to catch there will be another one.*

Another participant asserted:

> *Because a lot of us are under so much stress we maybe can't*
> *handle so much change so I think the tendency is to say what is*
> *the least we can do to give the semblance of collaborating but*
> *really maintaining more or less things as they are. That's being*
> *a bit cynical but there was definitely some of that.*

One participant observed a lack of compromise on the behalf of the Community

Management Committee members. This participant stated:

> *my experience was that by and large, and again there were always*
> *exceptions but in terms of general impressions - my impression*
> *was that the service providers were much more compromising and*
> *. . .were taking the Committees' views much more seriously than*
> *the Committee was taking the service providers' views. . . .It was*
> *almost like religion for the original committee members - 'we've*
> *got the vision and we are not going to compromise on this.'*

Some participants asserted that creative solutions could not be formed in the task groups

because of a strict adherence to the original restructuring ideas and concepts. Rigidity and

lack of compromise was noted, by a few participants, to inhibit the collaboration.

Attitudes such as cynicism regarding the process, suspicion, defensiveness to

changes proposed, lack of trust and indifference were also cited as inhibitors to the

creative process necessary for collaboration. In addition, several participants found that the rotating membership, as a result of the open structure of the task groups, meant that completed work (such as, goals and direction of the group) had to continuously be revisited, which slowed the process and achievement of the outcomes. The large numbers of participants in many task groups were found to inhibit collaboration in terms of achieving a shared goal. Although, a few participants observed the benefit of large numbers in the diversity of opinions that members brought to the table.

Several participants recommended that front-line workers (not just union representation) be part of the task groups, as they are already familiar with collaboration on a case by case basis and are more in touch with the needs of children and families than most executive directors. One participant asserted:

> *it would be more beneficial to have front line workers [at the table] because I think that is their job. . .to me front line workers or a lot of them are problem solvers - they may not be able to implement what would work but they have the ideas.*

In addition, a few participants suggested the need for forums for board members, of various social service agencies, to discuss collaborative opportunities.

Participants recommended that members of collaboration have the following attributes: ability to problem solve, comfort with risk, tolerance of "constructive anarchy", creativity, vision, organization and/or community power and a sense of humor. A few participants suggested the membership selection be specific, closed and purposeful to include only those with the power, attitude and abilities to carry the collaboration.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## ASYMMETRICAL RELATIONS OF POWER IN COLLABORATION

### Introduction

In addition to the factors noted, in chapter six, most participants described examples that illustrated the effect of power disparities on collaboration. Examples that illustrated asymmetrical power relations in collaboration included gendered relations in the task groups, the old boys network, lack of inter-ministerial involvement in the project, sparse county participation in the collaboration, a desire for more consumer involvement in planning efforts and the notion of inclusive planning. These issues are described in this chapter.

### Gendered relations

When it came to the issue of power differences, several participants adamantly asserted, both in the original interviews and the feedback session, that the disparities were not a result of gender but related to individual charisma, history of relationships, organization represented, size of funding dollars allocated to the agency, and position in the social service sector hierarchy. In fact, one participant labeled gender as a "red herring" used to avoid the real issues of restructuring that needed to be addressed.

However, several participants (all female) acknowledged gender as a determinant

of power differentials that influenced collaboration. One participant asserted:

> *Gender still has an impact. . . .I still sometimes think it's a man's
> world.*

These participants recounted gendered experiences in the task groups. One participant

noted:

> *men are viewed as being knowledgeable and I think. . . .if a woman
> comes up with an idea - like I always find whether it is me or
> because I'm female - I'm really not quite sure why it is, that I am
> ignored or not acknowledged. For example, I would come up with
> the same thing someone else was saying and he was a male and
> they were acknowledged. . . .[In addition,] men can come across
> as aggressive and there is no problem in the room. A woman
> comes across aggressive and she is a bitch.*

Another participant observed:

> *There were some pretty strong women that sat in those groups
> who frequently would be dismissed - when I think of some of the
> women who were really verbal throughout this whole process. . .
> they would often just be labeled as 'nags' or stirring up problems,
> 'you're not understanding' and therefore dismissed or their
> voices would not be silenced but minimized. . . .[Yet] where there
> were women from what were seen to be more powerful
> organizations under health [they] were heard better or had more
> powerful voices at the table [than participants who did not have
> organizational power bases behind them].*

However, some participants asserted that when the task group was predominantly female

in membership, and the women had strong personalities and opinions, there was not a

power difference between men or women based on gender. Yet others argued:

> *When you look at how decisions got made. . .and how much people used their voice. I don't have a little tally of every minute of each meeting and who spoke but my experience of it in the main is that when the old boys . . . in terms of the power base. . .spoke they carried more weight and. . .there [was] more value and there was more listening [to males]. . . .[There were] some very well informed, very well respected women. . .who are older, been in the service industry for a lot of years. Some of those women may have learned to work the way they have in the system by being in collaboration or [in] reference to that male group. . . .That doesn't mean that they necessarily have equal voice even if they can use it . . .and that doesn't mean though that you have the same footing when all is said and done. You can have a very well articulated and well reasoned argument and you can actually modulate your responses to the world and because you are younger because you are female and because, because, because, doesn't mean you are going to have the same input.*

This participant asserted that the gendered relations mediated individual influence on the

process.

Notably a few participants when discussing the role of gender in collaboration

asserted that women were less competitive, better at collaboration and better

communicators than men because of their "natural" tendency toward these traits. One

participant observed:

> *Women just tend to be better communicators and . . . more able to naturally communicate around a variety of issues. . . .Being right or wrong or winning or losing seems to be less [important] - the competitive factor maybe is less common with women overall.*

Another participant asserted:

> *I think women's psychology is more conducive to collaboration . . . Women are more cooperative and men are competitive . . .it is by nature.*

The participants who observed the "natural inclination" to gender roles appeared to take

gender divisions as given and monolithic. I suggest this viewpoint neglects to recognize

gender as a social construction that as such is contestable. The qualities assigned to the

categories of female and male are not destiny.


## The old boys network

Another example of the influence of power differentials in the collaboration was

observed by several participants as the old boys network. The "old boys" were described

as predominantly male, executive directors, managers, members of the community who

have been involved in the sector of social services for several years, worked for

organizations with significant funding bases, had a history of work together in the

community and as a result wielded a fair amount of power. As one participant asserted:

> *Big ticket money which is power, longevity of service which is*
> *generally about white, middle and upper middle class men*
> *having the longest years in these services in administrative*
> *positions and also having a network of their own with whom*
> *they are familiar with whom they have worked over pretty*
> *extensive periods of time . . .that plays a pretty powerful dynamic.*

However, as was noted in the feedback session with participants, the old boys network

also included a few women who represented large agencies and had a long history of

relationship with the sector's key players.  One participant stated:

> *there are certain voices in the community that are backed maybe*
> *ostensibly by more resources and I think that is pretty obvious*
> *when you think of children's services and where the big dollars*
> *are, so you know sort of what the power dynamics are.  And*
> *then those were voices that held sway and would be adhered*
> *to more and had more influence - it was an issue of influence*
> *in the room.  Which would often put people like consumers or*
> *representatives from other less well funded or smaller*
> *organizations in a less influential position.*

Some participants observed that the old boys network allowed those players more ability

to "jockey for position" in the task groups and engage in "subterranean management" of

the process by caucusing outside the groups to strategically plan their movements to

ensure their positions were fortified.  As one participant stated:

> *I think this old boys network likes to get their own way . . . You*
> *get the feeling that when things aren't going their way - don't*
> *move fast enough, don't come out with the decisions they want,*
> *don't do anything - then they simply set up another group.*

This activity was accepted, by most of the participants who identified it, as a reality of life

to be aware of and work with when dealing with the power disparities inherent in any

process.

In the feedback session, a few participants asserted that the network assisted

collaboration because of the trust, respect and history of relationship with others that

allowed projects to be completed.  According to one participant, history with others at the

table can assist collaboration as long as,

> *you are aware of where there has been strife and where there has*
> *been strength. If you are somebody who has had strife with other*
> *people and you have let that sit unattended then that is going to*
> *haunt you like with any other relationship you've had a conflict*
> *and you don't deal with the conflict properly afterwards.*

Similar to the role of historical relationship described in the literature review, this

participant asserted that if it has been acrimonious then it can generate mistrust among

participants, which can inhibit the process. However, if members have worked together in

the past and had some prior successes then the history can foster collaboration.

## Power relations among ministries

Another example of effect of power disparities is found in the discussion of inter-

ministerial involvement in the collaboration. Many participants noted a shortage of inter-

ministerial (e.g. health, education, housing) representation in the task groups. It was

suggested that this absence inhibited the process as all members affected and involved in a

common issue to take part in the process.

A few participants recognized that the involvement of other ministries, which serve

the needs of children, was a challenge because of the different structures, legislation and

funding base of each ministry. One participant stated:

> *the Ministry of Community and Social Services (COMSOC),*
> *because of the kind of ministry it is, that ministry has been*
> *community based. . . . it then says well we are going to*
> *collaborate with everybody else - education, health, housing*
> *. . . .But health doesn't have a community base. Its got big*
> *hospitals and there are public health nurses but that is a small*
> *piece of the pie.*

Power differences between the ministries were noted by several participants. They asserted that MCSS was a smaller branch of government in terms of dollars allocated to its services compared to education and health. These participants observed that other ministries have greater power, in the ministerial hierarchy, than MCSS due to their fiscal resources. However, in terms of local decision making authority, these participants thought, the other ministries' representatives tended to have less control. The decision making in those ministries was described as more centralized than in MCSS. This made it difficult, these participants asserted, to find a person from those ministries at the community level to participate in collaborative planning processes.

## Sparse county participation in the task groups

Many participants remarked on the sparse county involvement in several task groups. Regarding the small number of county representatives, one participant stated:

> *this wasn't a county exercise. . . .it was in so far as it was designed*
> *to address that but it also wasn't in so far as it wasn't locally based.*
> *If you talk really basic power dynamics . . ., the meetings didn't*
> *happen in the county, . . .the meetings happened in the city.*

A couple of participants asserted that the small numbers of county members in the planning process was based on similar issues regarding power differentials discussed in terms of gender, organizational networks and history of relationships.

However, most study participants did not explicitly view the issue of county representation in terms of power disparities. They attributed the lack of participation to inconsistent messages from the Ministry about the role that the counties were to play in

the process.  In the feedback meeting, one participant observed that the counties knew

they were to be involved but did not believe that the Ministry cared if they were because

the outcome had already been determined (by the Committee's recommendations).  I

would suggest all these factors, including power differentials, contributed to the limited

number and amount of county involvement in some of the task groups.

## Consumer participation in the task groups

An illustration of the effect of asymmetrical power relations was observed in the

discussion regarding consumer involvement in collaborative planning.  The majority of

participants recommended that more parents and children, who are consumers, should be

involved in the planning process.  When considering why so few consumers were

involved, several participants responded similarly to those noted below:

> *When you think about children's services, particularly those*
> *delivered by MCSS, that is a relatively small segment of the*
> *population - child protection, children's mental health, the*
> *young offender system - that is not huge.  And two of those*
> *- child protection and young offenders - you are not going*
> *to get a lot of parent involvement because we still ascribe a*
> *certain amount of shame to the need for having the state*
> *intervene in that way in our families.  It is about failure.*

As another participant suggested:

> *I think consumers are frightened, are scared, are burned out*
> *and any energy they have they spend it with their kids or they*
> *try and repair the relationships in their families. . . .[As the*
> *consumer they] have to play the role [of professional]. . .*
> *[they] cannot. . .go into a room and feel intimidated . .[they]*
> *have to be exceptionally confident.*

The following was observed by another participant:

> *Some people feel that they can't feel comfortable in a room*
> *full of professionals - others feel that they've got their own*
> *battles to fight with their own particular stresses that they are*
> *dealing with and maybe don't have the energy to look at the*
> *bigger picture - others maybe would rather leave it to those*
> *who are being paid as their jobs to design the system . . .*
> *consumers are really interested in getting service and having*
> *responsive service and having said they would, some of them,*
> *be as glad to leave the details of how you do that to other*
> *people - so long as they know that they are being heard and*
> *their wishes are being respected.*

A few participants also observed the difficulty obtaining resources to be part of the

process. To participate, consumers often had to cover costs of transportation, child care,

and juggle additional responsibilities (i.e., employment and home obligations).

One participant noted that consumers do not have a collective identity, which has

an affect on their power and hence their participation in collaborative planning:

> *their influence tends to be a bit like the sprinkler part of the*
> *hose so it doesn't have real force*

It was suggested that the development of power as a group of consumers would take time.

In the interim, some participants recommended other processes to involve consumers.

Some ideas included the use of a telephone survey, video-taped focus groups of children

and parents who receive services discussing their thoughts on the focal planning issue, and

a paid consumer advocate to participate in community planning.

However, many participants did not explicitly recognize the barriers to consumer

involvement as an inherent part of the power inequities between and within the categories

of consumers and service providers. Those participants who did ascribe the barriers to

power differences noted that the views of consumers who came to task groups were often

discarded and they were sometimes silenced. One participant noted:

> *You can set up the best opportunities for community*
> *collaboration and participation from the community base*
> *and it doesn't mean that people are experiencing themselves*
> *in a way that allows them to be fully participatory. It is an*
> *unusual moment I think when you get a consumer of service*
> *who can speak uninhibitedly and resoundingly about all of*
> *their thoughts for all the obvious reasons. We hold whoever*
> *in their family or in their life in our power because they use*
> *our services so there is always backlash conceivably.*

Another participant stated:

> *If. . .[a consumer is] getting the services now as minimal as*
> *they are. . .[the consumer doesn't] want to do anything that is*
> *going to jeopardize. . .[them] getting that service.*

These participants asserted that the different risks consumers assume, compared to service

providers, because of involvement in collaboration should be recognized.

However, a couple of participants did not support distinctions between the

categories of consumer and service provider. One participant asserted:

> *Another thing that really bothered me was this identification of*
> *us as service providers and other people as consumers. . . .I just*
> *felt it would have been good if we all decided on a principle that*
> *we were all consumers and providers.*

Several service providers and consumers who participated in the study noted the

importance of recognizing the differences between consumers and providers of

service.  One participant asserted the following:

> *When you go around the table and introduce yourself and you'd*
> *usually say that you are a parent or you are a consumer - it was*
> *interesting that a lot of people from the agencies would also*
> *count themselves as a consumer. . . .I thought that was interesting*
> *because as far as I am concerned I don't think you can wear two*
> *hats when you go into those meetings. If you are going as a*
> *representative of your agency or organization that hat is entirely*
> *different than coming at it from a consumer point of view.  I'm*
> *not going to worry about budgets or all these other things - I'm*
> *interested in getting services for my child.*

Another participant noted:

> *[Professionals] think that they are also consumers and there is*
> *a very big difference.*

A third participant asserted:

> *Because of power dynamics I think that the risk is too high on the*
> *other side of some lesser interests being negatively compromised*
> *i.e., First Nations, women's issues, some of the most basic issues*
> *for children who are not a power group, and the consumers being*
> *usurped by existing power structures because those structures*
> *aren't going to die overnight.  So I would support continuing the*
> *distinctions about who we are - I don't think you need to give up*
> *who you are to be in collaboration.*

## Notion of inclusive planning

A final example related to power differences was found in the notion of inclusive

community planning.  A couple of participants asserted the importance of having citizens,

consumers and service providers involved in all steps of the planning process - from the

original committee, through task groups, and into implementation teams. One participant

stated:

> *I really believe in inclusive planning. . .that it works the best.*
> *Everybody needs to start at the same place. . . .to struggle*
> *through the same struggles. . . . to have the same information.*
> *And I think one of the problems of this process was you had*
> *people who started on their own - got to the points after what I*
> *understand to be some very intensive work and lots of time and*
> *. . . [it] gets laid on everybody else and everybody else is trying*
> *to get up to speed. . . .I really do believe that citizens have*
> *perspectives to bring on the system because they are objective*
> *and they can raise things the rest of us wouldn't think of. . . .*
> *consumers have to be part of the process because they*
> *experience and live it everyday. . . .But it's like three legs of a*
> *stool - service providers also - we are bright people - we have*
> *lots of experience. . .So I really think you need to put all those*
> *people together and figure out a way to have people be equal*
> *partners. We are all partners in this and we are all invested in*
> *making it better with better solutions.*

This notion of inclusive community planning, I would suggest, does not recognize the

realities of power differentials in mediating who participate, when, in what way, and how

they are heard. Members do not come together as equal partners in a collaboration. All

participants will not be involved from the beginning of a planning process.

## Conclusion

Some participants noted the importance of recognizing, remembering and

attending to power disparities among members and cultivating a respectful way of

working together. As one participant observed, in order to attend to the power

differences there must be awareness of them and a commitment to allocate the time to

address their effect. Another participant suggested "maybe what you want to aspire to is

just respect" when managing asymmetrical power relations inherent in collaboration. A simple statement - I suggest it is a complex and challenging act in part because it is not merely a matter of attention but of reflexivity on the part of each participant on the social relations of power. Power relations will be explored in the concluding chapter.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT

# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

## Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of social relations of power. Most of the literature reviewed in previous chapters does not critically examine the effects of asymmetrical power relations on collaboration. However, many participants described examples that illustrated the influence of power inequalities in this study. In addition, several participants urged that power differentials be acknowledged to attempt to mitigate their effects on interorganizational collaboration. It is important to discuss relations of power because they are an inherent, evolving, and unavoidable part of the present context or environment of collaboration.

To address some of the factors, participants observed to influence collaboration, social relations of power must be recognized as part of the process that mediates who and what is heard and valued. Power relations are present in all arenas of social engagement and the field of interorganizational collaboration is no exception. Social and political relationships of power are reproduced in collaborative planning processes (Fischer, 1993; Forester, 1982; Perkins, 1995; Schram, 1993). Without an explicit critical analysis of the relations of power, theories of interorganizational collaboration will cloak with invisibility the reality of power disparities while struggling in practice to manage their effect.

## Environmental context of collaboration

A consistent theme raised by those who participated in this study, was the influence of the environment on collaborative ability. The context of this dance of many partners was complex and multi-layered. Governments at the provincial and federal level were reducing the amount of money they allocated to social supports for their citizens. For service providers this often meant less resources to provide for an increasing demand for service. At the same time, social service recipients voiced a desire for seamless service and coordinated access to those services. Governments wanted reduced duplication of services, greater accountability for the spending of public funds, and a reduced role in the financial support of services. Additionally, over the past decade, ministries of the Ontario government had been encouraging citizen involvement in planning processes to restructure social services for the future.

Many participants observed a variety of effects on collaboration as a result of government retrenchment in the social services sector. These effects included distrust, paranoia, suspicion, and fear among some members of the task groups. For others, this context provided the incentive or motivation to collaborate. In addition to these environmental factors, the broader context of the collaboration naturally permeated the endeavor.

The larger stage of this dance was a stratified society. The stage establishes some of the parameters of the dance - the breadth and width of the engagement - the unspoken boundaries and rules. Silence about the etiquette of the dance does not mean the presence of the boundaries is not felt. Similarly, the silence in some of the collaboration literature

about asymmetrical relations of power does not prevent the effects of power disparities on collaboration. Rather, it serves to obfuscate power relations present in all arenas of social engagement. Social relations of power such as concepts of equality of opportunity, self interest and pursuit of objectivity, effected this collaborative endeavor. Examples of asymmetrical power relations in this study are explored to illustrate the challenges they pose to the praxis and theories of interorganizational collaboration.

## Influence of asymmetrical relations of power on collaboration

Participants in this study provided illustrations of power differentials in collaborative processes. For example, several participants described gendered relations among members of the task groups. They noted that the gender of the person speaking affected the weight their participation was afforded in the process. These participants observed that when women spoke in the task groups their voices had a diminished influence on the outcome of the process. Sometimes women's voices were minimized, other times they were dismissed as "nags."

However, gendered experiences evident in several task groups were not equally distributed because of the complex relations of power. One participant noted that women who came from larger organizations had more power than those from smaller county services or consumers of social services. Experiences of gender were complicated by multiple social constructions such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and generation that constitute current social relations of power. As Code (1995) observed: "educated, articulate, well-dressed, [apparently] heterosexual, and not-too-forceful white women,

who are not too young or too old or too 'pretty,' have by far the best chances of being

heard in consulting rooms, classrooms, courtrooms, and the offices of various

bureaucracies throughout the affluent Western world" (p. 34). It is important to note that

these constructions are not monolithic, rather they are constantly changing, being resisted

and subverted.

However, several participants adamantly asserted that gender did not affect the

ability of participants to influence the collaborative process. Instead, these participants

saw the effects of power differentials and described their formation along organizational

and personal lines. If a person was charismatic, represented a large organization in terms

of funding dollars, and had a strong network of relationships with so called "power

brokers" in the sector, then they had greater influence on the collaboration. This

viewpoint appears to describe power as a property of individuals rather than an exercise

by individuals within evolving and complex social relations of power.

Another theme of this study was the limited amount of consumer involvement in

the task groups. Many participants noted the need for greater consumer participation in

future collaborative planning efforts. It was asserted that consumers of social services

should be involved in collaboration to address the needs of sector because they will be

profoundly affected by the decisions made. However, those who tend to be able to

participate in these processes are often not the vulnerable and those already marginalized

in society, nor are they those who will be most profoundly affected by the changes or

directions of the resultant outcome. This collaborative planning endeavor was no

exception. Many participants noted several barriers to consumer participation but most did not explicitly recognize the barriers as an inherent part of the present social relations of power.

In this study, most task groups were presumed not to have closed or selective membership. However, even with the assumed license to participate in collaboration, there were impediments to consumer involvement. The structure, the adversarial process, jargon used, and relations of power in the task groups did not create the "equal opportunity" to allow all to participate in the planning process under study.

If a consumer was able to attend the meetings, power differences influenced their ability to affect the endeavor. Some did not understand the jargon used while others felt intimidated by the professionals and some asserted their views only to have them minimized and labeled as unique individual experiences and as such subjective.

To be subjective is described as seeing "the world based on one's particular place in it" (Smith, 1989, p. 78). To be "accused of being subjective when objectivity is required is usually a charge of 'failure to maintain the necessary detachment or distance'"(Smith, 1989, p. 78). Subjectivity does not have the same value as objectivity, it is conceived often as a flaw or a detriment - a hindrance to participation in the collaborative process.

Objectivity is "conceived as a perfectly detached, neutral, distanced, and disinterested approach to [the] subject matter" (Code, 1995, p. 15). To be objective is to "stand separate from, and thereby to be able to describe, reality as it really is. . .the ability to see the world apart from one's particular place in it" (Smith, 1989, p. 8).

However, social reality is "a constructed reality, the product of the meanings people give to their interactions with others"(Smith, 1989, p. 8). Instead of a view from nowhere each can have a view from a particular place - a perspective that reflects the variety of interests and purposes of individuals and societies. In other words "one is always a perspectival knower; one always knows from a particular location" (Brown, 1994, p. 34). Claims of objective knowledge conceal the politics, power and bias of social relations (Brown, 1994) and hence collaborative endeavor.

The dichotomy - objective/subjective - illuminates the problem of binary opposites that are deeply rooted in dominant western philosophies and culture such as: public/private; male/female; individual/community; reason/emotion; and mind/body. In each pair one member is valued over the other and this has adverse social implications, especially when "these unequal values are so deeply embedded in our thinking"(Frazer & Lacey, 1993, p. 167).

Participant discussion of consumers and service providers in collaboration illustrates the importance of recognizing the complex social relations of power. A few service providers, in this study, felt that there should not be distinctions between categories of consumers and service providers. Rather, they should all be treated the same and not differentiated by title or position. Several participants disagreed. These participants maintained that the distinctions between the categories are important because of the different risks and challenges for consumers to participate in the process. The argument for discarding consumer and service provider labels makes invisible the relations of power between the two categories. This perspective "does not take into account the

differences in power between those planning, providing and using public services"

(Aronson, 1993, p. 368).

However, consumer and service provider categories are not monolithic. Within

the category of "consumer" there are those who are parents of developmentally challenged

children and those who are parents of young offenders. Those are only two of many

possible examples of a consumer of children's social services. Each parent will be treated

differently based on their child, their personality and a number of other factors. If their

child is labeled a young offender, they might feel blame and shame differently than may a

parent of a developmentally challenged child. If they are middle class they may have

more resources available to attend meetings. If they have a professional background they

may have more familiarity and comfort with the protocol and jargon of the process.

In the category of "service provider," an executive director and a front line worker

in an agency will have a different level of structural power. If the agency is regarded in

the network hierarchy as a "big player," it may have a louder voice in the room than

another person regardless of position and personality who comes from a smaller

organization.

Moreover, not acknowledging the distinctions among players in collaboration

obscures the variety of self interests that motivate members to participate. Consumers

often participate for different reasons than service providers. Within each category there

are unique and similar organizational and self interests. Many participants cited the self

interest of the task groups' membership as a hindrance to the collaborative planning

endeavor. Only a few participants recognized that self interest motivated people to

engage in collaboration and acted as an anchor for the activity if mobilized to achieve

shared goals. A couple of participants recommended the use of outside facilitators who

did not know the community because it was felt that they could be more objective and not

self interested. A few other participants advocated that only consumers be involved in the

process because they would be objective, not have vested interests and therefore achieve

the restructuring goals.

The adherence to a concept of objectivity sometimes hindered some participants'

abilities to view the self interest of all at the table as inherent, necessary, and beneficial to

the process. However, the desire for lack of bias and vested interest is not surprising

when considered in the context of the broader environment. The challenges of tolerating

(let alone embracing) the complexity of collaboration is "a tall order for a culture steeped

in the lore of scientific authority, [and] persuaded by the general systematicity of the

world" (McClure, 1992, p. 362).

This collaborative planning endeavor often valued objectivity in the form of non-

vested interests as a superior condition for a task group member over subjectivity in the

form of self/organizational interests. The language of the original business plan and that

spoken in the task groups often echoed sentiments of necessary objectivity and non-vested

interests in collaborative social planning. I find it difficult to conceive of someone without

self/organizational interests. Self interest is part of the complexity of social relations of

power and therefore should be embraced by collaborative praxis and theories. Power

differentials and self interest are inherent components in current social relations and

therefore part of interorganizational collaboration.

When self interest is not recognized, the political nature of the planning process is obscured. Instead collaborative planning is viewed as a benign activity to establish reasonable solutions to problems encountered. This approach does not recognize the complexity of problem construction, the interests served by particular decisions, and the differential ideas of what is best based on the person's particular viewpoint. As a result, it is necessary to be alert to ways that social relations of power affect collaboration. If asymmetrical relations of power are critically reflected upon and viewed as inherent and unavoidable in current social engagement then it is possible to mitigate the effects of power exercises to assist collaborative endeavor.

Future study would be useful to discuss in concrete terms how social relations of power could be mitigated in interorganizational collaboration. This study analysis limits much of the discussion of social relations of power to constructions of gender which ignores some additional constructions. Further study would be useful to examine social relations of power that include social constructions of sexuality, class, race, ethnicity and generation of participants in collaboration. In addition, the present political currency of interorganizational collaboration should be examined within the constructs of the dominant society in which its appeal is situated. Why is interorganizational collaboration touted as a solution to government retrenchment? How are the challenges of interorganizational collaboration related to the regnant cultural values and assumptions? These are some of the questions this study does not address.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides an interpretation of the factors influencing the collaborative process for the implementation planning phase of the restructuring of children's social services. The factors include aspects related to the environmental context, membership, purpose, resources, structure, process, and asymmetrical power relations. These findings may enhance existing theories regarding factors that affect collaboration between organizations. Factors can be useful to bear in mind when considering a collaboration but they are only a guide - a predictor of what might occur in the process rather than a recipe to apply to the endeavor. As it is likely that collaboration between organizations, consumers, governments and other citizens will continue to be pursued, it is helpful to understand the dynamics that affect the process in order to maximize the chances for its success.

Interorganizational collaboration is not a benign activity. It is complex and political. It does not occur in a vacuum. Collaborative processes are influenced by societal contexts and dominant cultural values. Social relations of power influence collaborative endeavor and should be critically analyzed when considering factors that impact collaboration. This collaborative endeavor was permeated by asymmetrical relations of power that included a preference for objectivity and a belief in equality of opportunity for participants to engage in collaboration. Interorganizational theories need to recognize and embrace the subtleties, nuances and complexities of social relations

inherent to collaborative endeavor. To recognize asymmetrical relations of power in

collaboration, theories of interorganizational collaboration and praxis must acknowledge

and foster a political epistemology - an explicit power analysis.

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## APPENDIX A
## - INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY -

October 20 1996

Dear Young Offender Services Task Group Member,

I am pleased to extend an invitation to you to participate in a research study on interorganizational collaboration in the social services sector. Please find enclosed information regarding the study - its purpose, objectives, and methods. I am facilitating focus groups for the members of the task groups involved in the restructuring of children's social services. It is an opportunity to reflect on the dynamics you experienced in the process and share what you learnt from the experience. What did you find aided the process of collaboration and what inhibited it? What advice would you give another community considering a similar task? These questions are intended as a sample of the areas the focus group discussion may travel.

The focus group for the young offender services task group members will be held:

**THURSDAY NOVEMBER 28 1996**
**2:30PM - 4PM**
**IN THE MEETING ROOM OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES NETWORK**
**SUITE 300 - 171 QUEENS AVENUE, LONDON**

Your participation in this research would be greatly appreciated. Please consider the invitation and R.S.V.P. I can be reached Monday through Thursday at the location of my student placement, with the Division of Long Term Care, #675-7680 or #1-800-663-3775. If you are unable to participate in the focus group but would like to contribute your experience please contact me to arrange another opportunity.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Liz Brown
Masters of Social Work Student (Community Development and Social Planning)

# APPENDIX A
# A CASE STUDY OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR
## - INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY -

The focus of the study is the London (Ontario) and Area Children's Services Restructuring Project (implementation planning phase) as an example of interorganizational collaboration in the social service sector. Elizabeth Brown is conducting the study as a student in pursuit of her Masters in Social Work, in Community Development and Social Planning, at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- what are the dynamics involved in the collaborative process of the implementation phase of the restructuring of children's social services in London, Ontario?

- what can be learnt from this interorganizational collaborative experience?

The objectives of the study are:

- to gain an increased understanding of the dynamic process of interorganizational collaboration in the social services sector.

- gather, analyze, and distribute data that may be of value to those who are considering and/or in the process of facilitating and/or participating in interorganizational collaboration in the social services sector.

The main data collection strategies include:

- semi-structured interviews with participants

- researcher observation of the process

- analysis of documentation (i.e., task group minutes and reports)

Your participation in the study is voluntary. If you choose to accept this invitation to participate you can expect the following:

- you can withdraw from the study at any point.
- interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. To safeguard confidentiality names will be assigned codes, the tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked file drawer, and the tapes will be destroyed by the end of May 1997.
- you will determine how much or whether to answer a question at all.
- strict confidence will be adhered to regarding any information you provide the researcher.

- you will remain anonymous. Excerpts from interviews may be incorporated in the final case report but any information that would identify you would be omitted. However, as the geographic location and project name will not be disguised some readers of the final report may speculate regarding participant identity.
- you can access the research advisor, Dr. Eli Teram (Professor of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1-519-884-1970 ext. 2198) should you have any concerns or comments regarding the conduct of the researcher.
- you will be invited to participate, if interested, in a review of the draft of the case study report. Alternative interpretations will be reflected in the final report.
- you can request a summary of key points from the study.
- you will sign and receive a copy of the consent form to participate in the study.

If you have further concerns or questions, please contact me at my home 519-425-1639

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,


Elizabeth Brown
M.S.W. Student at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

**·APPENDIX B**
# A CASE STUDY OF INTERORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR
## - CONSENT FORM -

The focus of the study is the London (Ontario) and Area Children's Services Restructuring Project (implementation planning phase) as an example of interorganizational collaboration in the social service sector. Elizabeth Brown is conducting the study as a student in pursuit of her Masters in Social Work, in Community Development and Social Planning, at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- what are the dynamics involved in the collaborative process of the implementation phase of the restructuring of children's social services in London, Ontario?

- what can be learnt from this interorganizational collaborative experience?

The objectives of the study are:

- to gain an increased understanding of the dynamic process of interorganizational collaboration in the social services sector.

- gather, analyze, and distribute data that may be of value to those who are considering and/or in the process of facilitating and/or participating in interorganizational collaboration in the social services sector.

The main data collection strategies include:

- semi-structured interviews with participants

- researcher observation of the process

- analysis of documentation (i.e., task group minutes and reports)

Your participation in the study is voluntary. If you choose to accept this invitation to participate you can expect the following:

- you can withdraw from the study at any point.
- interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. To safeguard confidentiality names will be assigned codes, the tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked file drawer, and the tapes will be destroyed by the end of May 1997.
- you will determine how much or whether to answer a question at all.
- strict confidence will be adhered to regarding any information you provide the researcher.

- you will remain anonymous. Excerpts from interviews may be incorporated in the final case report but any information that would identify you would be omitted. However, as the geographic location and project name will not be disguised some readers of the final report may speculate regarding participant identity.
- you can access the research advisor, Dr. Eli Teram (Professor of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1-519-884-1970 ext. 2198) should you have any concerns or comments regarding the conduct of the researcher.
- you will be invited to participate, if interested, in a review of the draft of the case study report. Alternative interpretations will be reflected in the final report.
- you can request a summary of key points from the study.
- you will sign and receive a copy of the consent form to participate in the study.

I have read and understood the purpose, objectives, and methods of the case study being undertaken by Elizabeth Brown on interorganizational collaboration in the social services sector. I am aware that the information I choose to provide will be held in strict confidence by the researcher and that my identity will remain anonymous.

I understand that I have a right to refuse to answer questions, withdraw from the study at any point, and access Dr. Eli Teram (faculty research advisor) if I have any concerns or comments regarding the researchers' conduct.

I am accepting the invitation to participate in this study voluntarily.

The purposes and procedures of this study have been explained to me by _____.
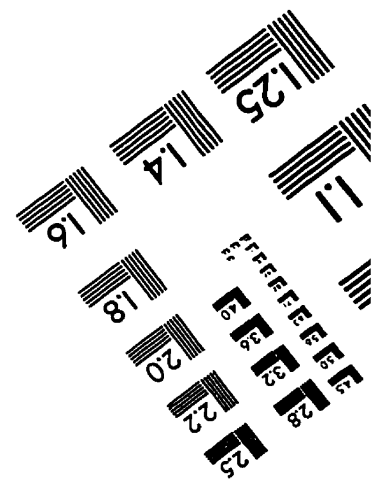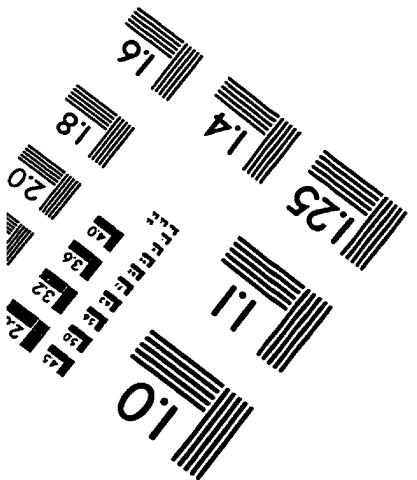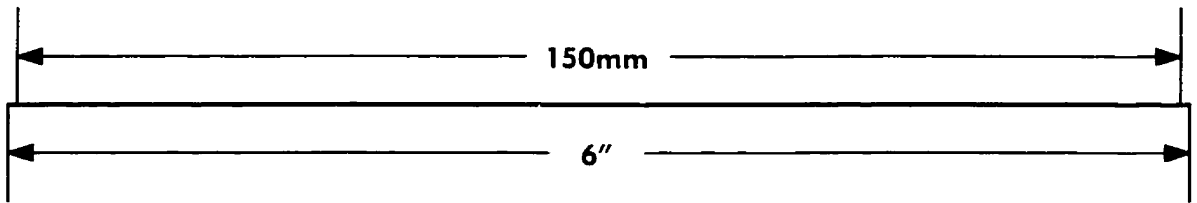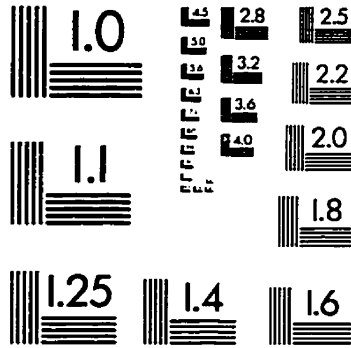(Please print)

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DATE: _____

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