Collaboration in Complex Social Problems: Cross Site Evaluation of Six Safe

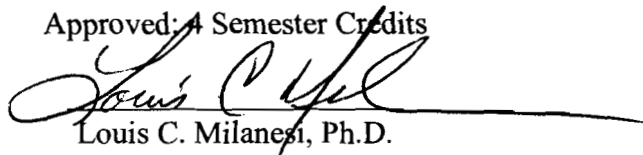Schools/Healthy Students Grantee Sites

By

Nathan F. Salzl

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Louis C. Milanesi, Ph.D.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

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The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI

Author: Salzl, Nathan F.

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration is effective in solving complex social problems because of the collaborative advantage achieved. To show this, six Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) grantee sites in Minnesota were examined to determine what aspects of collaboration had occurred and to what extent advantages were achieved through collaboration. Qualitative interviews with partner sites were analyzed for content describing the process and outcomes of the collaborative relationships. The author suggests that Safe Schools/Healthy Students is a sound example of complex problems addressed through collaboration. Results conclude that SSHS grantee sites achieved collaborative advantage and suggest collaboration is an effective way to address student health and safety and other complex social problems.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

Menomonie, WI

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Chapter I: Introduction

Despair shows us the limit of our imagination, imaginations shared create collaboration, collaboration creates community, and community inspires social change.

—Terry Tempest Williams

Statement of the Problem

One of the central advantages proponents ascribe to community collaboration is the ability to solve social problems that no single agency or organization could solve on its own. Such social problems are complex because their causes are multi-dimensional, and the solution therefore involves a diverse array of resources in the community. While past research has analyzed the definition of collaboration and described aspects of collaborative relationships, little past research has addressed the outcomes or advantages attained in collaborative partnerships or illustrated examples that an advantage occurred in response to collaborative relationships. Few measures of collaborative advantage in response to complex social problems are demonstrated in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate aspects of collaborative advantage in the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) initiative. The question that frames the focus of this paper is: How and why is the collaborative approach effective for addressing complex social problems? SS/HS represents an array of complex social problems in the six elements that grantee sites must address, including (1) safe school environment, (2) alcohol and other drugs and violence prevention and early intervention programs, (3) school and community mental health preventive and treatment intervention

services, (4) early childhood psychosocial and emotional development programs, (5) educational reform, and (6) safe school policies. Collectively, these six elements address student health and safety. This study investigates what results or positive outcomes occurred in these six elements at SS/HS sites, and how they could be attributed to collaborative advantage. The purpose of this paper is:

- To describe the collaborative advantage realized by communities funded by the SS/HS initiative

- To draw conclusions about how the collaborative process directly led to achieving outcomes.

- To illustrate how collaboration is effective in addressing complex social problems because of the collaborative advantage incurred.

Assumptions of the Study

This study uses qualitative interview techniques and assumes that the interviewees from the partner sites had the best first hand account of the collaborative partnerships examined. It assumes that interviewees had enough contact with other individuals involved in the collaborative to make generalizations about the process and outcomes of the collaborative partnerships. This study also assumes that answers are based on observations of actual processes and outcomes, and not based on perceptions of what could or should have occurred in the collaborative. Knowledge of collaborative principles or discussions about the purpose of the collaborative could skew this

perception. Efforts to avoid this interpretation were made by selecting questions and responses that referred to outcomes and effects of the collaborative partnerships.

Limitations of the Study

As this research question was a secondary analysis of data previously collected and analyzed, the interview questions originally posed were not specifically geared towards answering the primary inquiry of this study. This study was limited to extract data from answers to the original research questions.

Qualitative interviews were the main source of data for the findings in this paper. Therefore, findings are limited to the extent to which interview participants had knowledge or first hand experience with the issues for which they were questioned about. Interview participants may also have had inherent biases about collaboration from which they were drawing from their experience in the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant initiative.

This study is limited to demonstrating correlating aspects of collaboration with positive outcomes, showing that both exist, but not proving a specific directional relationship. Many factors having to do with the goals and design of the collaborative may have affected the outcomes of the program. This research suggests a preliminary theory of collaborative advantage that goes further than past research to analyze both aspects of process and outcomes of the relationships. Further analysis using rigorous scientific methods will be required to verify any causal relationships suggested within the current study.

Measurement of outcomes was limited by the timing and length of the study. The SS/HS partner sites interviewed may not yet have experienced the full effects of their efforts by the time this study was conducted.

Methodology

This study hypothesized that certain collaborative advantages, when achieved, enable collaboration to be an effective response to complex social problems. To investigate this, six Safe Schools/Healthy Students grantee sites in Minnesota were examined to determine what aspects of collaboration had occurred, what advantages were achieved through collaboration and what outcomes sites identified as a result of their collaboration. Findings show that these Minnesota Safe Schools/Healthy Students sites demonstrate how collaboration is an effective way to address student health and safety, as well as other complex social problems. The capacity of these sites to address problems is a manifestation of the advantage collaboration offers.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Complex social problems have been referred to in the literature as "messy" (Keast et al., 2004) and "wicked" (Dietz, Barker & Giberson, 2005:20; Keast et al., 2004:363; Wildridge, Childs & Madge, 2004:6). In *Solving a Wicked Problem*, Dietz et al. (2005:20) describe that "Wicked problems are ones for which each attempt to create a solution changes the understanding of the problem. They cannot be solved in a traditional linear fashion because the problem definition evolves as new possible solutions are considered and/or implemented. Because of its dynamic and evolving nature, the solution remains elusive during the problem-solving process." Moreover, complex social problems are so defined because they do not have a single cause or simple source, thus requiring solutions that reflect this complexity. These problems may stem from a variety of social forces, each complex in itself. Keast et al. (2004) suggest complex problems are difficult to address because they "defy precise definition, cut across policy and service areas, and resist solutions offered by the single-agency or "silo" approach." (p.363) These multiple social aspects may be dealt with separately by different government and social service agencies creating divisions and duplications in the pursuit of an effective response to the issue. Neither the problem nor the solution is tied solely to a particular field, community organization or government agency. Other actors, including community members or for-profit businesses, may also have an effective role to play in finding solutions to complex social problems.

While working alone on such problems that cross traditional organizational boundaries, organization's independent efforts may not be enough to arrive at a solution. Collaboration is needed when working along is not enough (Keast et al., 2004; Mandell

1999b; Wildridge et al., 2004). Collaboration occurs as multiple stakeholders come together in an attempt to offer a more holistic and integrated response (Keast et al., 2004). Mandell (2001) suggests that individual members may continue to act separately, but together they are transformed to a new whole. The organizations become an integrated system in which they recognize their interdependence. Mandell (1999a:59) relates a network structure to a jam session with jazz musicians. Each musician plays their own part while instinctively blending to form the musical whole.

Studies have described the use of collaboration to address complex social problems such as child abuse (Mulroy, 1997), child protection (Darlington, Feeney & Rixon, 2004), gang activity and other youth problems (Morrison et al., 1997), substance abuse (Nissen, Merrigan & Kraft, 2005), adolescent motherhood (Holman & Arcus, 1987), urban regeneration (Apostolokis, 2004), children and family needs (Daka-Mulwanda et al., 1995; Mandell, 1999a), domestic violence (Kelly, 2004), chronic physical and mental health problems (Johnson et al., 2003), community safety and crime prevention (Leonard et al., 2005; Keast et al., 2004), social exclusion (Tett et al., 2001), community health (Roussos & Faucett, 2000), mental health services (Glasby & Lester, 2004), school safety (Bilchik, 2000; Elizondo et al., 2003; Mohr & Mazurek, 2002) and school reform (Wohlstetter & Smith, 2000).

Tragedy: a Catalyst for Collaboration

Often a tragedy can initiate collaboration by raising awareness in the whole community of the extent of a problem. In one community in eastern Australia, a group of adolescents killed an elderly man. The community realized that it was the failure of the whole system and initiated the Goodna Service Project (Wildridge et al., 2004). First,

key community leaders came together to discuss the problem. Then, a pilot project was launched to integrate human services in the community, a system change designed to achieve better outcomes for community members.

Similarly, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SSHS) grant program was a national response to the Columbine tragedy and increasing public concern with school violence in the late 1990's. In the devastation after Columbine, people wondered why no one knew there was a problem in the school. How did law enforcement fail to see the threat and protect the students? How did the offenders go without mental health counseling which may have prevented them from acting out? Lastly, what could the school have done better to educate and integrate the students into a healthy community? The problems were clearly multi-dimensional and involved multiple agents. Funders of the SSHS grant saw collaboration as important because the whole community plays a role in the causes of and solutions for school violence. In this way, collaborative partnerships are a key element of the SS/HS program to collectively address student health and safety.

Underlying Principles of Collaboration

Other terms for collaboration cited in the literature include *partnerships* (Lasker, Weiss & Miller, 2001), *collaborative partnerships* (Cigler, 1999; Padgett, Bekemeier & Berkowitz, 2004; Ruossos & Fawcett, 2000), *partnership working* (Wildridge et al., 2004) and *network structures* (Keast et al., 2004; Mandell, 1999a, Mandell 1999b; Mandell 2001; Wohlstetter and Smith 2000). While the definitions for each term are nuanced, they share the common characteristic of multiple partners actively working together to solve a problem. In *Network Structures: Working Differently and Changing Expectations*, Keast et al. (2004) define a network structure to be more formalized than

traditional networking. In networks, different organizations are only loosely linked together, but in network structures relationships become formalized in an active attempt to solve a problem that they recognize as a mutual concern. In this collaborative effort, partners realize that no single agency could solve the problem alone. A network structure commonly includes non-profit and for-profit, government and non-government agencies with differing organizational structures. Such a network structure defies a simple hierarchy, and no single agency is in control. Therefore the agencies must all see themselves as mutually interdependent and working towards systems change for a common focus (Keast et. al., 2004). By this definition, collaboration is a complex approach to solving complex problems.

In *Collaborating – Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems*, Gray (1989) defines collaboration as "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible." (p.5) The different parties hear viewpoints and ideas that they could not have developed from their own experience. They also gain access to resources that they did not have in previous attempts to address the problem. The collaboration thus creates a richer, more comprehensive appreciation of the problem among the stakeholders than any could construct alone. Stakeholders also become aware of how the problem affects other stakeholders. In becoming more aware of a problem and its effects, stakeholders can identify and align behind a common vision of what the problem is, and develop a collective desire to solve it.

Gray (1989:21) suggests several specific advantages collaboration achieves in forming solutions to complex problems:

- Broad, comprehensive analysis of the problem improves the quality of solutions.

- Response capability is more diversified.

- Parties most familiar with the problem invent the solutions.

- Participation enhances acceptance of solution and willingness to implement it.

- Stakeholders can establish mechanisms for coordinating future actions.

Organizations sometimes build collaborative relationships due to external factors that force the interaction. Under turbulent conditions, organizations can have indirect and consequential effects on each other and become highly interdependent (Gray, 1989). They can no longer work alone because their actions to solve a problem create unwanted consequences or they run into constraints from others. Constraints can arise from the fragmentation of the service systems involved (Keast et al., 2004). One such key challenge that may force joint action is the fragmented location of resources. In a fragmented service system, one organization may have the impetus for action while another has key financial or human resources. The lack of a working relationship between organizations creates a distance from the solution.

Further, Gray (1989:29) identifies certain contextual incentives that promote organizations to collaborate. Such factors include (1) rapid change; (2) blurring of boundaries between government, the public sector, civil society organizations and the private sector; and (3) decreased government funding. Rapid change can result in multiple stakeholders working on a single problem because it affects each of them and the need for a solution is pressing. Blurring of boundaries can occur when multiple

agencies are separately dedicated to the same problem without formal agreements defining each agency's role. Decreased government funding can create a demand for other organizations to fill in service gaps if the funded project was seen as beneficial. These situations can be addressed by a collaborative approach to benefit partnering organizations or fill a need.

Collaboration is more than just interaction between organizations; it must be highly organized and coordinated for advantage rather than inertia to occur (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Collaboration not only crosses boundaries, it coordinates relationships. It involves an organized effort to solve a problem by a forum of stakeholders who must reach a consensus among each other (Gray, 1989). The stakeholders are those affected by the problem and by each other. The collaborative approach creates more formalized linkages between stakeholders. Mandel (1999a) distinguishes between networks, and network structures. In networks, there are linkages or relationships between organizations. While the linkages are formal (e.g. contracted services, past working relationships), the organizations are operating separately. Network structures are not reliant on contractual relationships. Instead, the advantage comes from exchanges based on interpersonal relationships, often called social capital. Individuals come together to form a common mission and actively work together to form an integrated solution. Network structures create synergy and trust among actors who otherwise are independent.

The collaborative environment goes beyond single problem solving and service delivery to set a stage for dealing with problems innovatively. The environment created allows for innovation in creating effective solutions (Keast et al., 2004:364; Mandell, 1999b). Once established, the infrastructure and environment allows for any number of

problems to be addressed. Relationships and knowledge shared reach into the future to address future problems. The environment created and the solutions achieved can be creative and expansive, or even just more resourceful. Mandel describes this as unleashing potential that is already there and refers to this as the use of social capital (Mandel, 1999b:13). This advantage of increased potential has also been referred to as partnership synergy (Lasker et al., 2001). Enhanced social capital embodies aspects similar to the collaborative advantage described (Macinko & Starfield, 2001).

Weaknesses of Past Literature

Past literature has not clearly demonstrated the impact of collaborative advantage. The published literature has focused on defining characteristics of collaboration, but little research has been published defining or measuring what occurred as a result of collaborative efforts. Research defining outcomes of a collaborative effort did not measure or describe the collaborative process that occurred. Past studies have not linked measured outcomes of collaborative solutions to aspects of the collaborative process in solving complex social problems.

Much literature on collaboration outlines individual components of the collaborative process. Elements or common themes are identified to define and describe what it means to collaborate. These may include aspects that seemed important or vital, aspects which seem likely to lead to success, activities of the collaboration or problems within the collaborative relationships. Little further analysis has been made to see how general concepts of collaboration were tied to positive outcomes, or whether positive outcomes even occurred.

Currently there is not a framework for defining or measuring how organizations can achieve more through collaboration than on their own. An opportunity exists to test the underlying assumption that collaborative advantage occurred as collaborative partnerships seek to impact complex social problems. Often the limited time frame of measurement during a grant period is too short to measure outcomes, and the advantage is assumed because collaboration was prescribed. Lasker et al. (2001) write, "Partnerships need to be able to document how well they are achieving such an outcome to determine if their early efforts are on the right track." (p.183) Furthermore, how specific advantages relate to the challenges of solving complex social problems has not been clearly explored.

The current study presents a cross site evaluation of six SS/HS grantee sites. This research builds on past literature in identifying what collaborative advantage occurred in the collaborative partnerships at these sites, and how those advantages assisted sites to achieve positive outcomes associated with the complex social issues involved in the SS/HS grant program.

Chapter III: Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate aspects of collaborative advantage in the SS/HS initiative. The question that frames the focus of this paper is: How and why is the collaborative approach effective for addressing complex social problems? This study investigates what results or positive outcomes occurred in the six elements at SS/HS sites, and how they can be attributed to collaboration. The purpose of this paper is:

- To describe the collaborative advantage realized by communities funded by the SSHS initiative

- To draw conclusions about how the collaborative process led to achieving outcomes.

- To illustrate how collaboration is effective in addressing complex social problems because of the collaborative advantage incurred.

This chapter outlines the background of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant and the instrumentation and methodology for collecting the data.

Background

In 2003, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) federal grant program invited consortia of SS/HS funded sites to submit applications for joint, cross-site research projects. This paper describes results from a Minnesota project funded through this SS/HS evaluation opportunity. Two local evaluators for Minnesota SS/HS grantee sites served as co-researchers: The Improve Group and the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI).

The focus of the research was to analyze the nature of collaborative advantage at six SS/HS grantee sites in Minnesota. Collaboration is a required feature of the SS/HS program; grantees must represent collaboration between the local education agency, local public mental health authority and local law enforcement agency. The federal SS/HS Initiative encourages further collaboration with other community stakeholders. In their program, SS/HS grantees must address the six elements described above.

The definition of collaborative advantage used in the design of this study is: to achieve outcomes that could not be achieved by any one partner individually, the desired primary outcome of collaborative efforts. Research investigated whether this advantage was composed of three features: improved client outcomes, enhanced social capital and enhanced public policy influence.

Subject Selection and Description

To collect the original data for this research, researchers interviewed SS/HS Project Directors, Local Evaluators and partner agencies from each of six Minnesota SSHS sites: Cloquet, Fertile-Beltrami, Minneapolis, Spring Lake Park (HAVENS), Stephen-Argyle, and St. Paul.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Project Directors used a prepared survey instrument to interview their own partner agencies in three of these sites. Researchers also interviewed federal staff, both those working in the SSHS Initiative at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and those contracted to provide technical assistance to SSHS sites. In addition, Project Directors, Local Evaluators and partner agencies completed rubrics that provided data for quantitative analysis on topics of the collaborative process and policy

activities. Finally, workshop discussion and participatory analysis yielded opportunities for further analysis in collaboration with Project Directors and Local Evaluators.

The secondary analysis addressing the topic of this paper - complex social problems, utilized the partner interviews and rubric instruments from the original data collected. No new data was collected for this paper. The data used excluded all identifying information other than the site names.

Data Analysis

Researchers employed qualitative methods of analysis, enhanced by quantitative analysis of short rubric instruments. In order to investigate processes and outcomes achieved by the collaborative partners, the authors selected instrument questions querying outcomes achieved, opportunities, successes, accomplishments, advantages, and changes (including policy changes). These questions focused on actual observed advantages rather than hoped for or unrealized accomplishments.

Responses to the following instrument questions informed the basis of this analysis:

- Please describe the activities and tasks that helped to strengthen the SS/HS collaborative or give it increased capacity to meet its goals.
- What are the biggest successes of SS/HS collaborative?
- What advantages have you noticed as a result of the SS/HS collaborative on the school district(s) involved with the SS/HS grant?
- What advantages have you noticed as a result of the SS/HS collaborative on the partners involved in the collaborative and on their agencies?

- What advantages have you noticed as a result of the SS/HS collaborative on students targeted by the SS/HS grant?

- What advantages have you noticed as a results of the SS/HS collaborative in the broader community?

- In what ways has your SS/HS collaborative been better positioned to make policy changes? What policy changes have resulted from that collaborative? Be flexible with how the local evaluator chooses to answer this. This could mean policy inside the school or school district, for the SSHS collaborative, or in the community.

- What new opportunities does working in this collaborative create?

- What has the SS/HS collaborative been able to accomplish that the individuals and agencies involved could not have accomplished individually? Prompt: Are there trends you've established or measured?

The data was further divided into aspects that described the process of collaborating and aspects that described tangible outcomes of the collaborative process. Process and outcome themes were identified and coded. Themes were cross-analyzed by site and those themes that were mentioned a total of 3 or more times and were mentioned by at least two different sites were considered strong themes. These were then validated through review of rubric data and cross analyzed with the preliminary analysis, and data from summary workshop sessions with Project Directors and Local Evaluators.

Limitations

As this research question provided a secondary analysis of data previously collected and analyzed, the interview questions originally posed were not specifically geared towards answering the primary inquiry of this study. This study was limited to extract data from answers to the original research questions. The relationship of research questions driving this study to the original inquiry about collaborative advantage offered plenty of relevant data for the inquiry.

Qualitative interviews with individuals involved in the collaborative partnerships were the main source of data for the findings in this paper. Therefore, findings are limited to the extent to which interview participants had knowledge or first hand experience with the issues for which they were questioned about. Students, parents and others in the larger community were not included in the sample. Interview participants may also have had inherent biases about collaboration from which they were drawing from their experience in the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant initiative, as they were directly involved in the implementation.

This study is limited to demonstrating correlated aspects of collaboration with positive outcomes, showing that both exist, but not proving a specific directional relationship. This study does not claim to find causal relationships between specific aspects and outcomes of the collaborative relationships, but more generally suggests a group of collaborative aspects appear to have lead to specific advantageous outcomes. Many intermediate factors having to do with the goals and design of the collaborative may have affected the outcomes of the program. This research suggests a preliminary theory of collaborative advantage that goes further than past research to analyze both

aspects of the process and outcomes of the collaborative partnerships to show that both collaboration and positive outcomes occurred. This theory suggests that collaboration is necessary for positive outcomes to occur in that it lays the groundwork for other necessary actions to be taken. Further analysis using rigorous scientific methods will be required to verify any causal relationships suggested within the current study in order to eliminate the possibility that the same result could have been achieved without collaboration.

Measurement of outcomes was limited by the timing and length of the study. The SS/HS collaborative sites interviewed may not yet have experienced the full effects of their efforts by the time this study was conducted.

Chapter IV: Results

Results were divided into two categories of Collaborative Process and
Collaborative Outcomes. Collaborative Process points identified included aspects of the
collaborative relationships. These points showed that collaboration did occur across
partner sites as intended by the grant initiative. Collaborative process points agree with
the literature defining collaboration, and broadly represent aspects of collaborative
relationships. Points identified included: Common focus/goals -focus on issues; Come
together on agreed upon/important/common issues; Communication; Duplication of
services (prevented or reduced); Knowledge of partners; Meetings; Platform for future
collaboration; Relationships; Share ideas; Share resources/access resources; and Trust.

Collaborative Outcomes identified revealed tangible outcomes achieved by the
collaborative partnerships. These outcomes were identified as unique advantages, or
outcomes that couldn't have been accomplished without the collaborative. Collaborative
outcomes identified included: Awareness; Bullying (addressed); Crisis plan; Increased
attendance (including absences reduced and decreased suspension); Mental health in
school; Mental Health worker in school; Officer in school; Safer school; Services
including: Access or increased access to services, Increased services – especially for at
risk population, Increased programs; Screening; and Training.

Item Analysis: Collaborative Process

Understanding the nature of the collaborative process at the SS/HS sites is the
first step in understanding if and how that process leads to collaborative advantage that
impacts SS/HS issues. Specifically, analysis focused on the relationships and interactions
between the partner sites, including characteristics of the relationships as well as the

actions partner sites took to collaborate. By identifying aspects of the collaborative process present at multiple sites, this analysis sought to describe how the collaborative process might yield capacity to address problems.

Analysis revealed that collaboration allowed partner sites to agree upon important and common issues, cited 10 times across 3 sites. This helped to create a common focus. Partners with the same goals were able to further develop and coordinate efforts on their common aims. Collaboration allowed partners to come together on issues they all considered important, and to share ideas and work together on solutions. Establishing a common vision helped to channel the energy and activities of collaborative members on important issues. Results from the Collaborative Process Rubric reemphasized these findings; 100% of Collaborative Process Rubric survey respondents said establishing a common vision was important to the collaborative partnership's successes or challenges.

Meetings were cited 15 times across 4 sites, indicating a strong importance in the collaborative process. Partners were informed about the broader scope of SS/HS through meetings. Regular meetings, typically monthly, helped to improve communication. The meetings were referred to as a task that helped strengthen the collaborative partnership. Though this may seem like an obvious activity, the structure provided and involvement in the meetings may play a pivotal role in collaborative relationships. Meetings are the main vehicle for communication and decision-making.

Communication was clearly an important part of the process that enhanced the collaborative partnership's capacity for making an impact. Communication was cited 14 times across 4 sites. Partners mentioned the importance of formal and informal communication, and remarked that communication improved between partners when they

joined the collaborative. 100% of Collaborative Process Rubric survey respondents said open and frequent communication is important to the collaboratives' successes or challenges. Improved communication brought new opportunities for partners, including access to resources they had not known about and avenues to attain those resources. Moreover, communication increased partners' knowledge about each others' organizations. Knowledge of partners was cited 13 times across 4 sites. This included knowledge of available staff resources and services as well as knowledge of other organization's roles and structures. One partner indicated it was an opportunity to clarify to others what their own agency does. Finally, communication brought the sharing of ideas, the strongest process theme cited 17 times across 4 sites. Partners indicated a new opportunity was the ability to share expertise, knowledge, plans and perspectives. Different partners brought different skills to the table and partners felt this resulted in effective solutions being implemented. For instance, communication allowed partners to find out what is working in one school and implement it across all schools.

Sharing resources was another collaborative process that allowed partners to realize economies and increase capacity. Sharing of and access to resources was cited 9 times across 3 sites. Partners described greater access to resources from other agencies. This was frequently referred to as "pooling resources." In this way, the collaborative partnership opened up a network of resources that were not available to individual organizations before. One site described this new capacity as having resources "just a phone call away". Sites also described that they were able to combine common programs and share staff members. Partners explicitly noted that sharing such resources was something that the SSHS collaborative was able to accomplish that agencies could not

have accomplished individually. Efficiencies were also created as duplication of services was reduced. Duplication of services was cited 4 times across 2 sites. One example of this was the ability of the school to provide mental health services to students by working with the local mental health provider instead of developing their own mental health services. Schools were also able to tap the expertise of local mental health provider staff, in providing training for teachers on identifying mental health issues.

Relationships developed or grew stronger in the collaborative partnership. Relationship strength was cited 14 times across 4 sites. Partners indicated strong relationships gave the collaborative partnership increased strength because they laid the groundwork for increased trust and future collaboration. Some of the partners indicated relationships were pre-existing but grew stronger as a result of the collaborative partnership. One site indicated that their relationship with the local police department existed previously, but a greater awareness of the relationship formed. For another site, new and better working relationships formed between the school administration, faculty, students, community, the fire department, First Response and the city administration.

Trust was either already established in partner relationships, or it was formed as a result of strengthened relationships; in either case, partners referred to increased trust as an advantage of the collaborative partnership. Trust was cited 9 times across 3 sites. 88% of Collaborative Process Rubric respondents felt the level of trust improved through the collaboration. With trust, partners were able to talk honestly about sensitive issues and break down "turf" barriers.

The relationships formed laid groundwork for future collaboration. Partners were more likely to collaborate on new projects after the collaborative. Future collaboration

was cited 7 times across 2 sites. 82% of Collaborative Process Rubric respondents agreed that partners were more likely to work together on a project in the future than they would have been without the SS/HS experience. One partner responded that knowing each other and what people have brought to the table in the past created a trusting relationship where partners are always welcome at the table even though they may not have the capacity (money) to do anything at the time. They thought they could resurrect the collaborative partnership a year from that time if they disbanded, and that they could be creative about finding resources to meet needs. In these ways, elements of the collaborative process including a common vision, a structure for common discussion (meetings), good communication, knowledge and resource sharing and strong or strengthened relationships yielded capacity for the collaborative to have an impact on difficult issues.

Item Analysis: Collaborative Outcomes

Analysis of outcomes focused on tangible changes, such as people, processes, services or changes in the environment that were put into place as a result of the collaborative process. Thus, outcomes identified in the analysis did not exist prior to the collaborative partnerships. By identifying such outcomes present across sites, this research aimed to show that positive outcomes had occurred at SS/HS sites during the collaborative process.

Increased awareness of issues was the strongest outcome theme, cited 27 times across 4 sites. Issues included mental health care, substance abuse, violence, early childhood education and bullying. Increased awareness occurred within schools as well as in the broader community. Partners described that raised awareness reduced stigma

about issues such as bullying and mental health in the community. Awareness both reminded people of issues and changed perceptions by giving people more accurate information and clarifying the issues. For one site, perception of the county mental health system changed from seeing the county as a source of mandates to a source of support.

Schools were able to address bullying and implement bullying plans. Bullying was cited 15 times across 3 sites. Partners identified this anti-bullying effort as an accomplishment of the collaborative partnership. Overall, sites described increased awareness about bullying, which decreased stigma and invoked an openness to talk about the issue. Policies and procedures for dealing with bullying were implemented and there was a decrease in bullying incidents. One partner reported that kids now know how to handle bullying and respond in a problem-solving way. They are now approaching teachers informing them of situations.

Crisis plans were another outcome, cited 5 times across 2 sites. Schools were able to update their crisis plan, and they saw this as important for school safety. Some schools had a crisis plan in place but prior to the collaborative were not able to put them into practice. The collaborative partnership allowed schools to update and implement crisis plans as well as have consistency across schools.

Partners also identified increased student attendance, in the form of reduced absences and decreased suspensions. Attendance was cited 8 times across 3 sites. The reasons behind this accomplishment varied from site to site, perhaps because the reasons underlying student's absence varied. Improved attendance may be attributable to the addition of a truancy officer in school, mental health interventions and anti-bullying

efforts. Police officer or liaison presence in the school was mentioned 11 times across 1 site.

One of the more major and direct outcomes of the collaborative partnership was addressing mental health by implementing mental health services in the schools. Mental health in the school was cited 18 times across 4 sites. Mental health interventions in the schools reduced social stigma and increased awareness around mental health issues, facilitated mental health referrals, placed mental health workers in schools, and provided for mental health screening. In addition, having a mental health worker in the school was cited 11 times across 2 sites. Partners described that mental health workers within the schools impacted students and their families with resources and knowledge school staff did not have. Mental health focused training and education in schools also increased the capacity to address school issues. Through training, teachers were better able to identify mental health issues. More resources for mental health and life skills education were made available for use in schools. As a result of the relationship between the school and mental health partners, mental health services were more readily accessed by students and families, including treatment programs and therapy.

Screening was cited 11 times across 4 sites. Screening included early childhood screening, general mental health screening, and screening for post-partum women. While partners at all sites mentioned screening practices, a few also specifically commented on the access to and use of standardized screening tools not used before. Partners referenced the previous accomplishments in response to questions regarding the advantages of collaboration, and what they could not have accomplished individually.

Collaboration promoted new access or increased access to services, cited 11 times across 4 sites. This included student access to services not available to them before, and new access for teachers to resources that help students. Access to services occurred inside and outside of the school. Increased guidance to and advocacy for students helped them to access resources outside of school. Partners described that students, and their families gained access to a greater variety and quantity of services than was available to them before. This was noted especially for at-risk populations. Partners described that the collaborative partnership improved the reach of services to students who needed it most, including those with the highest needs, those most difficult to serve and new age groups.

Access to services included the increase of programs and services available. Increased programs or services were cited 14 times across 4 sites. In the school, new programs were started for students. Some of these were after school programs (e.g. a bullying program), and included programs for both students and parents.

Training was defined as an outcome because it was mostly referred to as a success, opportunity and something that increased as a result of the collaborative partnership. Training was cited 17 times across 3 sites. Sites provided training that they would not have been able to individually. More training occurred in areas like early childhood, mental health, substance abuse, violence prevention, anti-bullying curriculum and police training. Training resulted in benefits to students. Partners described that, because of staff training, teachers became more equipped to handle problems. Teachers became more aware of their role and of student mental health needs.

Partners reported a safer school as a result of the collaborative partnership, cited 6 times across 3 sites. School safety is a primary target of the grant. References to school safety included increased security (e.g. security of school entrances), presence of security equipment, a safer environment and a better sense of safety. These were all mentioned as advantages of the SS/HS grant experience.

Chapter V: Discussion

Collaborative advantage as defined by this research is apparent in the results of this study. Collaborative advantage occurred in the form of enhanced social capital and improved client outcomes resulted from the relationships and interactions of partners. The outcomes defining the success of the collaborative partnership, including increased capacity to provide and access services, implementation of mental health services and mental health workers, screening, increased training and awareness, implementation of bullying and crisis plans, increased attendance and a safer school, collectively have the outcome of safer schools and healthier students. These outcomes could not have been achieved without the process of collaborating and research participants directly attributed them to collaboration. Outcomes appear to have resulted from the collaborative process, as they were stated to be an advantage of the collaborative partnership and would not have been achieved without the collaborative partnership. It was clear that collaboration did occur and correlates with these outcomes. Relationships or strength of relationships provided an avenue for the exchange of knowledge and resources to occur. Though this relationship may be a correlation (collaboration existed where positive outcomes occurred), it may not be causal. More rigorous scientific methods are necessary to determine true causal relationships. This study does however come closer to suggesting that positive outcomes and a collaborative advantage occurred as a result of collaboration by providing some evidence of outcomes that partners viewed as an advantage of the collaborative partnerships.

One limitation of this study was that measurement of outcomes was limited by the timing and length of the study. The SS/HS collaborative sites interviewed may not yet

have experienced the full effects of their efforts by the time this study was conducted. Other outcomes, and larger scale community or policy outcomes may have been achieved as time passed after the collaborative study.

Collaborative Advantage Occurred

One purpose of this study was to describe what, if any, collaborative advantage occurred at these SS/HS sites. Collaborative advantage, in the form of enhanced social capital and improved client outcomes resulted from the relationships and interactions of partners.

The outcomes defining the success of the collaboration, including increased capacity to provide and access services, implementation of mental health services and mental health workers, screening, increased training and awareness, implementation of bullying and crisis plans, increased attendance and a safer school, collectively have the outcome of safer schools and healthier students. These outcomes could not have been achieved without the process of collaborating and research participants directly attributed them to the collaboration.

All of the process points identified represent elements of enhanced social capital. Social capital is gaining resources and support from individuals or groups to achieve a common goal. Stronger relationships formed between the SS/HS collaborative partners in the process of collaborating. These relationships formed from increased communication between partners in meetings and other interactions. Partnerships were strengthened by agreement on common goals, and partners developed a common focus and understanding of the issues by discussing different aspects, and sharing perspectives.

Trust played an important role in the partner relationships as agreements were made to work together and share ideas and resources.

By collaborating, partners could share ideas and gain a greater knowledge of each other. With greater knowledge of partners, sites had a better understanding of the resources and services available for students. This awareness and the relationships formed allowed them to reduce or prevent duplication of services, thereby decreasing the effort needed to achieve their goals. Partners could use existing resources already available. In these ways, social capital was formed in the process of collaborating.

The identified client outcomes addressed the improvement of the health and safety of the students and their families. The increased capacity to provide services and programs to students had a direct impact on students. The services and programs primarily included mental health services, mental health screening and bullying prevention programs. Having a mental health worker in the school as well as having access to external mental health agencies allowed the schools to deliver services they could not have delivered before. Services were able to reach at-risk populations and students who otherwise would not have received help. Additional training on mental health issues allowed teachers to recognize issues and take appropriate action to refer students to services. Training and increased awareness of bullying allowed bullying to be addressed and occurrences of bullying decreased.

Outcomes with a more indirect impact on students included the implementation or updating of the school's crisis plans, having an officer in the school and a raised level of awareness in the school and in the community of important issues. Updating the schools crisis plans was important to keep students safe in the future.

Defining the Success of the Collaborative

Both the processes as well as the outcomes were described as achievements, advantages or success of the collaborative partners. The questions selected specifically referred to advantage. Questions were reflective of the outcomes the collaborative partners had achieved, not what they hoped to achieve, what they were supposed to achieve, or what did not work. Partners viewed the relationships formed, knowledge and resources shared and the common goals and mission formed, as successes of the collaboration. The platform for future collaboration was seen as an advantage that would reach into the future. The organized process and support of the SS/HS initiative greatly assisted sites to work together and establish relationships. The achievements would have been much more difficult in the absence of the SS/HS grant.

The outcomes defining the success of the collaborative partnerships, including increased capacity to provide and access services, implementation of mental health services and mental health workers, screening, increased training and awareness, implementation of bullying and crisis plans, increased attendance and a safer school, collectively have the outcome of safer schools and healthier students. These outcomes could not have been achieved without the process of collaborating and research participants directly attributed them to collaboration. The SS/HS grant was formed because of the recognition that the health and safety of students involves multiple players, including the school, law enforcement, and mental health agencies. Neither the school nor any other agency alone could deliver the full array of services needed to keep students safe and healthy. The school needed the expertise of the mental health system to provide direct services and screening, as well as train teachers and staff on plans and

procedures. Mental health providers could more readily access at-risk students with a presence in the school. The school required the knowledge and expertise of law enforcement to implement crisis plans as well as develop and enforce truancy policies and create a safe school. School and law enforcement partners benefited from building relationships and planning for earlier interventions with students before a crisis point is reached. The presence of all three players created synergy and allowed them to develop a complex solution utilizing the resources of all three agencies.

The recognition that mental health plays a role in violence and bullying and therefore is a vital aspect of school safety, further illustrates the tie between these three stakeholders. Teachers were trained to recognize problems and refer students to counselors before issues escalate into violence. Law enforcement was able to develop response plans to deal with future problems that occur, and mental health professionals and teachers could work to prevent problems in the first place.

Outcomes Resulting From the Collaborative Process

Relationships or strength of relationships provided an avenue for the exchange of knowledge and resources to occur. The relationship between the schools and other partners created an exchange of knowledge that led to new solutions to address problems. The schools could not develop the knowledge and expertise of the law enforcement agencies or mental health services on their own. The relationships also created knowledge of what resources were available and access to those resources. Becoming aware that a resource existed created a new point of access to that resource. In some cases this meant referring students to outside resources. Finally, collaboration encouraged each organization to contribute their own expertise while benefiting from the

expertise of others. This allowed specialization to occur without the "silo" effect of a single agency solution.

The SSHS went further, developing stronger relationships to be able to provide internal access to partner services by students and faculty. This occurred with mental health services and the truancy officer. Services were delivered by partners and the level of access to those services was not available before, nor possible to develop independently. The collaborative action of working together allowed the outcomes to be delivered.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Past literature has defined collaboration and suggested that it is important for problems with no simple solution, without providing evidence of the outcomes achieved by collaborative partnerships. Past research did not clearly define the outcomes of collaborative partnerships or describe how outcomes were a result of collaboration. This study has attempted to draw conclusions about the advantage incurred from collaboration by determining both aspects of the process and outcomes that occurred in SS/HS collaborative partnerships. Both a collaborative process and positive outcomes clearly occurred. This does not conclude that other events were not concurrent that could have influenced the outcome. Rigorous scientific methods are necessary to determine true causal relationships. This study does however come closer to suggesting that positive outcomes and a collaborative advantage occurred from collaboration by providing some evidence of outcomes that partners viewed as an advantage of the collaborative partnership.

Measurement of outcomes was limited by the timing and length of the study. The SS/HS collaborative sites interviewed may not yet have experienced the full effects of their efforts by the time this study was conducted. Future interviews may reveal longer term advantages and impacts of collaborative partnerships. Measurement of outcomes was also limited by the experiences of the partners interviewed and may not have captured those of the whole community. Partners could only report what they had seen and experienced themselves. A true measure of the impact on the community takes more time and broader measurement than the questions used for this study. Suggestions for future research include greater measures of impact on the community, and a longer length of time to measure the full impact and outcomes. Furthermore, research on the sustainability of the collaborative partnerships would further explore the impact on organizations and the communities. Future research is needed to address what aspects were sustainable and how sustained aspects lead to long term outcomes.

Conclusions

Collaboration is effective in addressing complex social problems because of the collaborative advantage incurred. Aspects of the process identified in SS/HS partnerships are consistent with past literature defining collaboration. It is clear in the interviews that collaboration occurred in the SS/HS partnerships and suggested that positive outcomes occurred from the collaborative aspects identified. This research suggests that collaboration is a useful solution for complex problems because of the collaborative advantage incurred. Collaboration is needed when problems are complex and cross traditional boundaries.

The SS/HS initiative intended to address the complex social problem of keeping students safe and healthy. The problem is complex because it includes multiple elements, including the environment of the school, the use of alcohol and other drugs, violence, school and community mental health prevention and treatment and others. The variety of elements involved different agencies, which each have different organizational structures, different funding sources, and independent goals. Collaboration is a formal process of coordinating the agencies to address problems collectively in a way that goes beyond what they could do alone.

Future grants addressing complex social problems may benefit from including collaboration between multiple agencies as a required program component. This may provide more effective solutions and save time and money over the support of solo agency approaches. Together agencies can create more effective solutions and achieve more than on their own.

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