




Supporting Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems: What does Research Tell Us?

Kay Johnson, MPH, EdM
Director, Project THRIVE

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Established at the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), **Project THRIVE** is a public policy analysis and education initiative to promote healthy child development.

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Wisdom from Lisbeth Schorr

Why your work as bridge builders, connectors, and systems changers is so crucial – and so hard

"It's hard in part because when you leave the safety of replicating individual programs that have been proven successful by elegant experimental evaluations, you have to turn to other ways of determining what works.

It's also hard because the money, the training, the construction of the knowledge base – they're all done in silos, they're all categorical. And when you try to cross those boundaries -- to get the missing mental health expertise injected into child care centers, or the child development orientation into the child welfare system, or the parent support center to connect families to medical homes or to partner with the drug treatment program – you're pushing a mighty boulder up a very steep mountain."


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Definition: System

- A system is a set of interacting units with relationships among them.
 - UNITS are coupled in some way.
 - SET implies units share some properties.
 - Each unit is constrained by, conditioned by, and dependent upon the status of other units.
 - Managing a system typically means to find common goals and have fixed decisions
- This theory doesn't work for LOOSELY COUPLED SYSTEMS.

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Loosely Coupled Systems

- As "organizational" size increases
- As environments become more complex
- As relationships become less direct
- When people view problems differently
 - disagree about cause and effect
 - hold different definitions
 - see different realities
 - have varied levels of commitment.

MA Berger, 1981; Weick, 1981.

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5 Steps for Changing Loosely Coupled Systems

- Create doubt
 - e.g. change assumptions, problem definition, challenge existing logic
- Shift structures and "resocialize"
- Increase participation, direct impact
- Fix the disconnects and linkages
- Augment information exchange

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Many variations, similar purposes

- States have created networks of local collaboratives to coordinate and manage the delivery of comprehensive, community-based services to families.
 - Typically partnerships
 - Varied forms, functions, and financing strategies
 - New structures for connecting stakeholders and reorganizing resources to support more comprehensive, integrated services

Bryant & Cohen. Networks of Local Comprehensive Community Collaboratives, The Finance Project, September 2003; Hayes, Thinking Broadly: Financing Strategies for Comprehensive Child and Family Initiatives, The Finance Project, March 2002.

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Principles for Comprehensive Community Collaboratives

- Results orientation
- Attention to governance relationships
- Community involvement & engagement
- Strategic financing
- Adaptable to changing conditions

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Sample of ECCS Efforts to Support Local Systems Development

– AZ First Things First	– KY Kids Now & Community Early Childhood Councils
– CO Smart Start & Early Childhood Councils Act	– MI Great Start & local collaboratives
– CT Early Childhood Partners, plus 4 demos	– OK Smart Start
– IL Birth to Five Project & All Our Kids (AOK) Network	– VT Building Bright Futures & Regional Affiliate Councils
– IA Community Empowerment	– WA Kids Matter & Building Connections to "communities in practice"

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Resources & References

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- Mattessich, Paul and Monsey, Barbara R. Collaboration: What Makes It Work, 2nd Edition. St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2001. Who is willing to take some of the ownership of these next steps?

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Resources & References

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For more questions, information, or suggestions about Project THRIVE contact:
646-284-9644 ext. 6456
Thrive@nccp.org

Kay Johnson, MPH, MEd THRIVE Project Director	Jane Knitzer, EdD Executive Director, National Center for Children in Poverty
Suzanne Theberge, MPH THRIVE Project Coordinator	Leslie Davidson, MD Senior Health Advisor

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