



Engaging Practitioners in Program Evaluation
A Preliminary Report of Perceptions and Observations
Of Practitioner-Caregiver Partnerships in Early Intervention

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Purpose: To engage early intervention practitioners (serving 0-5 year olds) in an evaluation of their efforts to carry out their program's mission to use evidence-based models of practitioner-caregiver partnerships.

Program: Grand Island Public Schools: Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education

- *District:* 7,967 students
- *Population served:* 97 infant/toddlers, 146 preschool-age children with disabilities
- *Team members:* 9 ECSEs, 3.5 SLPs, 1 OT, 1 PT, 1 Psychologist, 3 Service Coordinators, 2 bilingual (Spanish) interpreter/family liaisons
- *Programs:* Weekly home visits to families or community-based preschool/child care teachers; speech-only services (n =25 children); ECSE center-based preschool (n=25 children)
- *Staff Development:* Two years training on coaching, practitioner-caregiver partnerships and identification of children's learning opportunities in natural environments.

Program's Vision: *Caregivers (parents, family members, childcare providers and preschool teachers) who have direct relationships with children who have special needs, are able to identify priorities for their child/family, and advocate for and utilize the resources, supports and strategies that they perceive to be helpful.*

Challenges:

- Different types and levels of training and professional experience across team members.
- Different histories/philosophies of intervention service: child-focused and/or caregiver-focused.
- Changing beliefs and attitudes about caregivers and their ability to address children's needs.
- Documenting what practitioners believed was and was not happening in services with families and with community teachers/care-providers.

Evaluation Plan Steps:

1. **Developed Outcome Indicators of Success** (January 2005)
 - a. *What do we see as your role during home and community setting visits?*
 - o What do we hope to accomplish?"
 - b. *What evidence is there that we utilize this role, in terms of behaviors and practices?*
 - o What is happening in visits?
2. **Identified Themes in Suggested Success-Indicators** (February)
 - Relationship building and advancing a partnership between practitioner and caregiver
 - Focusing caregiver's attention on child's abilities and learning opportunities
 - Supporting caregivers' interactions with child and use of new strategies
 - Caregivers showing ability to solve problems and support/guide child's learning
 - Caregivers' collaborating and participating in the visits
 - Caregivers generating questions/solutions/ideas independent of practitioner/visit
 - Children showing developmental growth/new accomplishments
3. **Reframe Themes through the Lens of Evidence-based Practices**
 - Partnerships (Dunst & Paget, 1991)
 - Child's learning opportunities (Bruder, & Dunst, 2000)
 - Caregiver confidence & competence (Guralnick 1989)
4. **Confirm Evaluation Questions: (focus: intervention integrity)** (February-March)
 - What is the evidence of a **partnership** between the practitioner and the caregiver?
 - How do the practitioner and caregiver perceive their contributions to the **partnership**?
 - What evidence is there of practitioners building caregivers' **competence and confidence**?
5. **Designed Data Collection System** (April-May)
 - Video-taped **observations** of 30-60 minute visits between practitioners and parents or care-provider/teacher
 - Post-visit phone **interviews** with practitioner and parent or care-provider/teacher
 - **Coding** behavioral indicators of successful partnership and caregiver-child competence/confidence as present/absent (time sampling: each 2 minute observation interval)
6. **Collected Field Data** (August-September)
 - Practitioners secured caregiver consent for observation, video-taping/interviews
 - Practitioners coordinated schedules for evaluator's visits
 - 6 visits: (2 home visits, 2 community preschool visits, 2 IFSP/IEP meetings)
 - 2 ECSE Teacher, 3 Speech-Language Pathologists, 1 Service Coordinator
 - 12 telephone interviews (6 practitioners, 4 parents, 2 teachers)
7. **Analyzed/Summarized Field Data** (September-October)
 - Frequency of behavioral indicators per session and rate per minute (mean = 38 minutes of observation)
 - Mean frequencies per a) home visit b) preschool classroom visit, c) IEP/IFSP meeting
 - Caregiver and practitioner self-reports of perceived participation in visits
8. **Reported Back to Team and Administrators** (January 2006)

See Tables 1, 2 and 3 attached.
9. **Discuss Program Adjustments** (TBA)
10. **Develop New Evaluation Questions** (TBA)

Table 1.

Minimum mean rate per minute for success indicators noted for practitioners and caregivers in home visits (2), classroom visits (2), and IEP/IFSP meetings (2).

Success Indicators	Practitioner Promoted		Caregiver Demonstrated	
	Rate/min.	Rate/min.	Rate/min.	Rate/min.
	Four Visits	Two Meetings	Four Visits	Two Meetings
Collaboration/Partnership	.53	.45	.77	.59
Reflection/New Learning	.66	.32	.28	.23
Action/Participation	.21	.07	.23	.15
Totals	at least 1.40/min	.84/min.	1.28/min	.97/min.
OVERALL MEANS				
Home visits		1.26		1.36
Preschool Visits		1.54		1.19
IEP/IFSP Meetings		.84		.97
for six visits	at least	1.21/minute		1.17/minute

Table 2.

Mean ratio of partnership behaviors in home and classroom visits between practitioners and caregivers

Partnership Success Indicators	Ratio of Practitioner-Caregiver Behaviors	
	Home Visits	Classroom Visits
	Collaboration/Partnership	1 : 1.5
Reflection/New Learning Opportunities	2 : 1	2.5 : 1
Action/Participation	1 : 1.8	1.6 : 1
Overall	1 : 1.1	1 : 1.2

Table 3.

Percent of practitioners (6) and caregivers (6) reporting perceptions of successful participation in visits

Quality Indicators	Practitioners' Perceived Effort	Caregivers' Perceived Effort
Collaboration/Partnership	100%	100%
Reflection/New Learning	100%	83%
Action/Participation	100%	67%
examples	<i>"We reviewed and established what would be tried and then how we would reflect on it at the next visit. - She had decided she wanted to use the pictures on a strip for each of the boys, during the challenging times of the routine. So, we decided that next time, we would see how that was going, and reflect on did it help."</i>	<i>"I always get to put my two cents worth in first", "There is open, honest communication between us". "She leaves it up to me as to solutions after we talk about the ideas"</i>

FINDINGS TO-DATE

1. Practitioners spent comparable amounts of time establishing the caregiver as a partner and encouraging the caregivers to reflect on daily routines and learning opportunities for the children.
2. Practitioners made greater efforts to encourage teachers in preschools vs. parents in home visits to reflect on possible learning opportunities for their children.
3. Practitioners spent the least amount of time engaging caregivers in planned or spontaneous learning opportunities with the children or developing plans for what would happen after the practitioner leaves.
4. Caregivers demonstrated active interest in partnering during visits with practitioners.
5. Caregivers' rates of active reflection, problem solving, and generation of new ideas for targets and learning opportunities for their children were notably low for the amount of practitioner contributions in this area.
6. Caregivers generally were not actively contributing information about new learning opportunities or developmental changes, nor practicing use of new strategies during visits.
7. Caregivers' participation in demonstrating, problem-solving or planning new strategies/learning opportunities was not notably different from that observed in IEP/IFSP meetings. Explicit attention to the quality/frequency of caregiver's specific strategies was seldom noted.
8. All practitioners perceived their efforts as focused on fostering partnership and active participation and could give specific examples of those efforts.
9. Fewer Caregivers reported learning new ways to help their child and making plans for what they would do before the next visit with the practitioner.
10. **These six early intervention practitioners are demonstrating effort in engaging caregivers as partners and encouraging them to reflect, problem-solve and identify their children's learning opportunities. However, the quality of these efforts deserve further discussion/exploration to know if the subsequent level of caregiver participation is sufficient to effect child change/development.**

References:

- Bruder, M.B. & Dunst, C. (2000). Expanding learning opportunities for infants and toddlers in natural environments: A chance to reconceptualize early intervention. *Zero to Three*, 20(3), 34-36.
- Dunst, C. & Paget, K. (1991). Parent-professional partnerships and family empowerment. In M. Fine (ed.) *Collaboration with parents of exceptional children* (pp.25-44). Brandon, VT: Clinical Psychology Publishing Co.
- Guralnick M. (1989). Recent developments in early intervention efficacy research: Implications for family involvement in PL: 99-457. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 9(3), 1-17.