



Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC): An Ecological Approach for Enhancing School Readiness

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INTRODUCTION

School Readiness:

- *School readiness* is defined as "a quality that renders the child able to participate successfully in a regular public school curriculum" (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, p. 338).
- Currently there is a paradigm shift within school readiness research that no longer views school readiness as the responsibility of the child, but rather the *responsibility of the systems within which the child operates* (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).
- Efforts to promote school readiness are best represented by an *ecological-dynamic model* that conceptualizes the transition to school in terms of relationships between a child's characteristics and home, school, and family contexts (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).
- Within an ecological-dynamic model, key elements of a successful transition to formal schooling emphasize the importance of *building partnerships, collaboration, support, mutual respect, and a shared vision* (Groak & McCall, 1996; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001).

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) and School Readiness:

- CBC is an indirect model of service delivery in which parents, teachers, and a consultant engage in collaborative problem solving to address the academic, social, or behavioral needs of a child (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996).
- CBC is an organized, data-based approach that uses a structured four-stage process (i.e., problem identification, problem analysis, plan development, and plan evaluation; Sheridan et al., 1996).
- CBC promotes a partnership model that allows for families and schools to work together around a common interest, and build upon and promote capabilities and strengths of family members and school personnel.
- CBC has received substantial empirical support (see Sheridan, 1997 for a review) however, the potential for CBC as an effective model for enhancing school readiness in early childhood populations has not been investigated.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

- The purpose of the study was to assess CBC as a model for enhancing school readiness within an early childhood context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the effects of CBC on school readiness behaviors across home and school?
- What are the effects of CBC on parents' and teachers' perceptions about their relationship?
- How do parents and teachers of young children rate the social validity of CBC?
 - How do they perceive the effectiveness and acceptability of CBC?

METHODS

Participant Characteristics:

- 24 consultants
- 43 teachers
- 57 parents
- 48 clients
 - Age 6 and under
 - 33 male, 15 female

Independent Variables:

- CBC four-stage problem-solving process (i.e., problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and plan evaluation) with partnership building procedures (i.e., collaboration, mutual respect, and shared decision making).
- Intervention strategies implemented in the context of CBC, addressing social, behavioral, or academic concerns.

Outcome Measures:

- **Direct Observations** - conducted at home and school
- **Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale-II**- collected to assess change in parent-teacher relationship
 - 2 Factors: Joining and Communication to Other (Vickers & Minke, 1995).
- **Social Validity Measures** - collected to assess clinical meaningfulness of change
 - Acceptability of CBC- Assessed with the Behavioral Intervention Rating Scale (BIRS) - Acceptability factor (Elliott & Von Brock Treuting, 1991).
 - Perceived Effectiveness of CBC - Assessed with the Behavioral Intervention Rating Scale (BIRS) - Effectiveness factor (Elliott & Von Brock Treuting, 1991).

Analyses:

- Effectiveness of CBC on case outcomes was evaluated through Effect Size analysis (Busk & Serlin, 1992)
 - Effect sizes in home and school settings for each case were computed to discern degree of behavior change as a function of CBC-based interventions.
 - Effect sizes are interpreted in terms of standard deviation units.
- Effectiveness of CBC in strengthening the parent and teacher relationship was evaluated through paired sample t-tests for Joining, Communication to Other, and Total scores.
- Perceptions of CBC effectiveness and acceptability were collected post-consultation and evaluated descriptively.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Median Effect Sizes by Setting

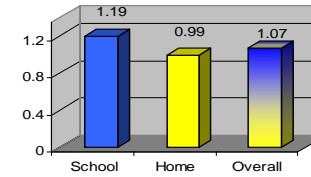


Figure 2. Parent PTRS Mean Ratings Joining and Communication-to-Other

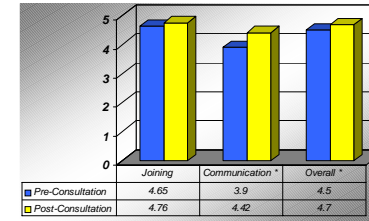
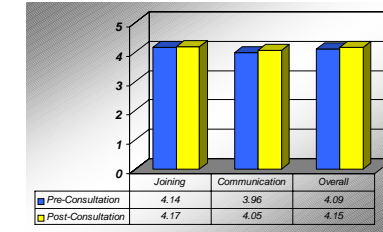
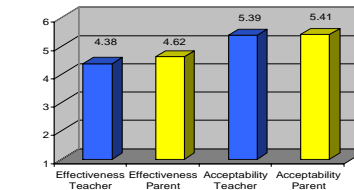


Figure 3. Teacher PTRS Mean Ratings Joining and Communication-to-Other



- Paired sample t-tests were used to examine parents' and teachers' perceptions of their relationship.
- Significant findings at the $p < .01$ level are denoted by an asterisk.

Figure 4. Parent and Teacher BIRS-R Mean Ratings



DISCUSSION

- Target behaviors related to early academic skills are considered important predictors for school readiness. The study's effect sizes suggested positive outcomes across social, academic, and behavioral areas.
- Overall median effect sizes are suggestive of large treatment effects. There was a high degree of variability in case outcomes, suggesting that CBC was more effective for some young children than others.
- The significant positive change in parent communication suggests that CBC may provide a mechanism for parents to communicate more openly with their child's teacher. The relational context promoted in CBC may enable increased communication with their child's teacher.
- Teachers did not perceive the same positive shift in communication as a function of CBC as did parents.
- Neither parents nor teachers reported a significant change in joining with each other as a function of CBC. Pre-consultation ratings were high, therefore it is possible that parents and teachers believed that optimal levels already existed. However, additional research is necessary to explore the degree to which CBC can be used to enhance this important feature.
- Consistent with previous research, parents and teachers reported high degrees of acceptance and effectiveness with CBC (based on BIRS scores).
- Ratings of effectiveness were relatively lower than acceptance, suggesting that something about the model was particularly acceptable to parents and teachers.
- Additional research is necessary to explore relational dynamics that affect communication patterns and active parental involvement.

LIMITATIONS

- The small sample size limits generalizability of the findings. Replication is necessary.
- There was a high degree of variability in the CBC case outcomes. This was addressed in part by presenting median effect size scores for outcome analyses.
- Direct observations were conducted by parents and teachers with no reliability data collected.
- Treatment integrity was based on parent and teacher self-report.
- No follow-up data were collected. Therefore, it is unknown how prepared for school the children were given the treatment they received.