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. 118).
- 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 (Groek & McCall, 1996; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gerrie, & Higginbotham, 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, Kretschwili, & 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) and operationalizes procedures (i.e., collaboration, mutual respect, and shared decision making).
- Intervention strategies implemented in the context of CBC, addressing social, behavioral, or academic concerns.

METHODS

Participant Characteristics:
- 34 consultants
- 43 teachers
- 57 parents
- 48 clients
- Age 6 and under
- 33 males, 11 females

Independent Variables:
- CBC four-stage problem-solving process (i.e., problem identification, problem analysis, plan development, 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 (Valkos & Minke, 1995).
- Social Validity Measures - collected to assess clinical meaningfulness of change
- Perceived Effectiveness of CBC - Assessed with the Behavioral Intervention Rating Scale (BIRS) - Effectiveness factor (Elliott & Von Brock Treating, 1991).

Analyses:
- Effectiveness of CBC on case outcomes was evaluated through Effect Size analysis (Bach & Sohle, 1993)
- 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

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 outcomes 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.

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