

INTRODUCTION

Family-School Partnerships

- High-quality relationships between parents and preschool teachers have been shown to be positively related to young children's academic performance (Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988; Hill, 2001).
- Continuity among caregiving systems (e.g., family and school) and positive relationships among parents and service providers contribute to the effectiveness of early intervention efforts (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), and improvements in academic achievement (Hill, 2001).
- Collaborative family-school relationships are important during the preschool and early elementary years (Rafaelle & Knoff, 1999) as early experiences support the parents' development of a meaningful role construct and promote future parental engagement in the child's education.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

(CBC; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996; Sheridan & Kratochwill, in press)

- A structured, indirect model of service delivery wherein a consultant works collaboratively with parents, teachers, and support staff to address the academic, behavioral, and social needs of a child.
- A strategy for embedding specific parent-teacher-consultant collaborations around a child's individual functioning to strengthen family-school relationships (Sheridan, Wames, Schemm, Cowan, & Clarke, 2004) and enhance a child's learning and developmental experiences.
- An organized, data-based approach that uses a structured four stage process (i.e., needs identification, needs analysis, plan development and implementation, and plan evaluation) that focuses on joint goal setting and collaborative decision-making.
- Promotes a partnership by focusing on the interactions between the child and primary systems in his or her life and building skills and competencies within families and educators.
- CBC has received substantial empirical support (for a review see Sheridan, Clarke, & Burt, in press); however, the degree to which CBC effectively addresses child needs, builds partnerships, and strengthens parent-educator relationships in early childhood settings is unknown.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the effects of CBC in addressing learning, behavior, and socioemotional goals across home and school settings?
- What are the effects of CBC on parents' and teachers' perceptions about their relationship with one another?
- How do parents and teachers rate the social validity of CBC in terms of their perceptions of the effectiveness of CBC; their ratings of acceptability of the CBC process; and their satisfaction with the CBC consultant and consultation services?

METHODS

Setting

- Cases conducted within two geographic regions (i.e., a moderate Midwestern city and urban city in the Intermountain West)
- 41.8% cases conducted in Head Start classrooms
- 58.2% in public preschool or kindergarten classrooms

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Sample Size	52	
Gender		
Male	37 (71%)	
Female	15 (29%)	
Mean Age (SD)	4.9 (1.0)	
Ethnicity		
White	73.1%	
Biracial	7.7%	
Hispanic	5.8%	
African American	5.8%	
Other	7.6%	
Primary Language Spoken at Home		
English	85.7%	
Other	14.3%	
Total Number of Adults Living at Home		
One	20.8%	
More than One	70.2%	

Independent Variables

➤ Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

➤ *Evidence-based intervention strategies* implemented within the context of CBC to address academic, behavioral, or social concerns.

Dependent Variables

➤ *Behavior Change*: Direct observations of specific target behaviors were conducted by parents and teachers across home and school settings throughout baseline, treatment, and follow-up stages.

➤ *Parent-Teacher Relationship*: Assessed with the Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale II (Vickers & Minke, 1995).

➤ *Social Validation*: Consultees' subjective perceptions of case outcomes were collected to assess clinical meaningfulness of change:

➤ Perceived Effectiveness of CBC: Assessed with the Behavioral Intervention Rating Scale (BIRS) - Effectiveness factor (Elliott & Von Brock Treuting, 1991)

➤ Perceptions of Goal Attainment: Assessed using Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS; Kiresuk, Smith, & Cardillo, 1994)

➤ Acceptability of CBC: Assessed with the BIRS-Acceptability factor (Elliott & Von Brock Treuting, 1991)

➤ Satisfaction with Consultant and CBC Services: Assessed with the Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF; Erchul, 1987)

Table 2. Change in Child Behavior Reported as Effect Sizes.

Variable	Home	School
N	29	46
Mean ES ¹	.90	1.23
Median ES	0.97	1.13
SD	1.9	1.4
Min ²	-4.29	-.86
Max ³	4.71	7.38

1 = average effect size at home and school
2 = minimum effect size at home and school
3 = maximum effect size at home and school

Analysis

➤ Effectiveness of CBC evaluated through Effect Size analysis (Busk & Serlin, 1992).

➤ Effect sizes were computed for all target behaviors using a "no assumptions" approach (Busk & Serlin, 1992). Differences in phase means for each case were divided by the standard deviation of the baseline producing a quantitative index of treatment effects.

➤ Effects sizes are interpreted in terms of standard deviation units, relative to baseline level of performance.

RESULTS

➤ Effect of CBC on the parent and teacher relationship was evaluated through paired sample *t* tests for Joining, Communication to Other, and Total Relationship scores.

Table 3. Mean Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale Ratings and Significance Between Pre-and Post-CBC Scores for Parents and Teachers

Participant	Joining		Communication to Others		Total	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Parent						
M	4.65	4.76*	3.90	4.42*	4.50	4.70*
SD	0.33	0.26	1.02	0.68	0.43	0.29
n	23		23			
Teacher						
M	4.14	4.17	3.96	4.05	4.09	4.15
SD	0.67	0.76	0.73	0.62	0.65	0.66
n	28		27			

Note. All ratings reflect mean item responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale with high scores reflecting positive responses.

* = Significant increase from pre- to posttest; $p < .01$.

+ = Increase approaching significance; $p < .10$.

➤ Perceptions of CBC effectiveness, goal attainment, acceptability, and satisfaction were collected post-consultation and evaluated descriptively.

Table 4. Social Validity Ratings of Parents and Teachers

Measure	Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
BIRS Effectiveness Factor ¹	4.62	.78	4.38	1.31
BIRS Acceptability Factor ²	5.41	.46	5.39	.72
GAS ³	4.55	.51	4.33	.72
CEF Satisfaction ⁴	6.40	.55	6.37	.68

1 = ratings based on a 6-point Likert scale where 1 = low perceived efficacy and 6 = high perceived efficacy

2 = ratings based on a 6-point Likert scale where 1 = not at all acceptable and 6 = highly acceptable

3 = ratings based on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = situation got worse and 5 = goal completely met

DISCUSSION

➤ CBC provides a structured, data-based model of service delivery that addresses key elements of early intervention using an ecological-dynamic, family-centered approach to problem-solving.

➤ This study provides promising results for the utilization of CBC with early childhood populations in addressing concerns, as well as facilitating communication and collaboration on behalf of the child.

➤ Interventions implemented within the context of CBC were effective at addressing behavioral, academic, and social-emotional concerns shared by parents and teachers.

➤ Parents perceived their communication and overall relationships with their child's teacher more favorably after CBC; however, teachers did not report similar findings.

➤ It is possible that the relational context established by consultants in CBC provided an avenue for parents to communicate openly with their child's teacher and, ideally, feel more comfortable in that role.

➤ Prior to CBC, teachers already reported high levels of communication and although this was slightly improved following CBC, teachers' perceptions of communicating concerns and goals with parents may have already been within their purview.

➤ Given consultees' high ratings of acceptability and the perceived relationship between acceptability and use of interventions (Witt, Elliott, & Martens, 1984), it can be expected that they may be likely to sustain joint interventions in the future.

LIMITATIONS

➤ Participants were referred for CBC services over the course of several years; thus, random assignment to conditions was not possible resulting in a quasi-experimental approach.

➤ Observational data were recorded by parents and teachers rather than independent trained observers which may have affected the accuracy of the reported data.

➤ Direct outcome data were derived solely from parent and teacher report.

➤ No direct measure of intervention integrity was included.

➤ The degree to which current findings can be generalized across diverse settings remains unclear.

➤ The large variability in effect sizes raises questions about participants or case characteristics that promote or impede outcomes.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

➤ Further investigation is needed to determine the contexts and conditions under which CBC is effective in addressing targeted concerns that may directly or indirectly affect child outcomes.

➤ Additionally, consultation and intervention research is needed to examine the degree to which plan elements and treatment outcomes are related.