Conjoint Behavioral Consultation: The Effects of a Family-School Partnership for Enhancing Positive Development in Early Childhood

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools

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 (Brophy, Calwell, & 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 (Rosen-Keefe & Pinto, 2006), and improvements in academic achievement (Hill, 2001).
- Collaborative family-school relationships are important during the preschool and early elementary years (Bagattie & Keefe, 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, Krantzwilli, & Berger, 1996; Sheridan & Krantzwilli, 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, Warren, Schmitt, 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 Midwest city and urban city in the Intermountain West).
- 41.8% cases conducted in Head Start classrooms.
- 58.2% in public preschool or kindergarten classrooms.

RESULTS

Analysis
- Effectiveness of CBC evaluated through Effect Sizes (Bask & Sattin, 1992).
- Effect sizes were computed for all target behaviors using a “no assumptions” approach (Bask & Sattin, 1992). Differences in phase means for each case were divided by the standard deviation of the baseline producing a quantitative index of treatment effects.
- Effect sizes are interpreted in terms of standard deviation units, relative to baseline level of performance.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

| Sample Size | 52 |
| Gender | Male 37 (71%) | Female 15 (29%) |
| Mean Age (SD) | 4.9 (1.10) |
| Ethnicity | White 71.1% | Black 9.8% | Hispanic 5.8% | African American 5.8% | Other 7.0% |
| Primary Language Spoken at Home | English 85.7% | Other 14.3% |
| Total Number of Adults Living at Home | One 20.8% | More than One 79.2% |

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 (Vickers & Minke, 1995).
- Social Validation: Consultants’ subjective perceptions of case outcomes were collected to assess clinical meaningfulness of change.

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

Social Validation Ratings of Parents and Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Participants</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Participants</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Participants</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- Significance increase from pre-to-post: *p < .01.
- Increase approaching significance: p < .10.

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

Table 2. Change in Child Behavior Reported as Effect Sizes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean ES</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median ES</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>-4.29</td>
<td>-.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BER F</td>
<td>Effectiveness Factor</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BER Fp</td>
<td>Acceptability Factor</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEF Satisfaction</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- Significance increase from pre-to-post: *p < .01.
- Increase approaching significance: p < .10.

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.

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 consultants’ high ratings of acceptability and the perceived relationship between acceptability and use of interventions (Witt, Elliott, & Martas, 1994), 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.