

Professional Development: Findings from the Getting Ready Project

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Professional Development in ECE

- Why it is so important today
 - The roles are very complex
 - Accountability is increasing
 - Resources remain scarce
- We need to know what works, for whom, in what contexts, at what cost

Sheridan, S. M., Edwards, C. P., Marvin, C., & Knoche, L. L. (2009). Professional development in early childhood programs: Process issues and research needs. *Early Education and Development*, 20, 377-401.

Objectives of PD

- Advance knowledge, skills, & dispositions of practitioners
- Promote a culture for ongoing professional growth
 - Ethic of responsibility in individuals
 - Capacity for sustaining growth within organizations and systems

“The early childhood field is at a place where professional development practice and craft knowledge require a larger and firmer platform of theoretical and empirical expertise, in order to guide planning and implementation of the ambitious kinds of school and child care reforms that are demanded in the current era of services expansion and accountability.”

-Sheridan, S. M., Edwards, C. P., Marvin, C., & Knoche, L. L. (2009). Professional development in early childhood programs: Process issues and research needs. *Early Education and Development*, 20, 377-401.

Three Main Forms of PD

1. Specialized training

- Expert model of training
- Courses, workshops, conferences
- Usually have a format that provides generalized knowledge to groups with limited follow-up
- Most effective when trainings involve opportunities to observe and practice or role-play key skills and receive immediate feedback

2. Coaching/Consultation

- Direct, individualized efforts in a setting to improve attitudes, skills, or dispositions of practitioner
- Involves frequent interactions over a relatively short period of time to effect changes
- Supportive, collaborative exchanges

3. Communities of Practice

- Theoretically linked to apprenticeship
- Group of individuals with shared common interests
- Many forms: teacher action research, descriptive review, lesson study, inquiry group, documentation study
- Requires expert facilitator but is essentially a model of peer teaching/learning
- Aimed toward long term change and sustainability

We need to know about the learning processes and dynamic interactions underlying all these forms of professional development in real-world ECE settings.

- To replicate effective programs
- To build sustaining systems
- To fine tune programs that are not succeeding to the degree we want

Getting Ready Project



- A partnership of UNL researchers and community agencies
- Goal is to improve school readiness of low income children by strengthening parent confidence and competence



Introduction to the *Getting Ready Project*

- Takes a systems view that frames school readiness in terms of *relationships* among child, family, and professional community, and their interactions with one another
- Goal is to promote *parents'* engagement with their children and with teachers and other caregivers.



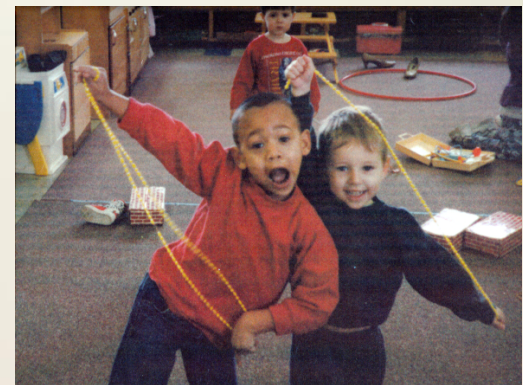


Parent Engagement

- *Parent engagement with children* includes: (1) warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness; (2) support for a child's emerging autonomy; and (3) active and meaningful participation in learning and literacy.
- *Parent engagement with professionals* includes interactions that: (1) support families in enhancing the “curriculum of the home” and (2) help children navigate the transition from home to school.

Performance Sites

- **Blue Valley Community Action Partnership (BVCA)**
 - 4 Early Head Start home visitors, two rural communities
 - 1/3 of families are Hispanic/ Latino; 1 bilingual family consultant
- **Head Start Child and Family Development, Inc. (HSCFD)**
 - 16 Early Head Start home visitors, two rural communities
 - 1/3 of families are Hispanic/ Latino; 6 bilingual family consultants
- **Central Nebraska Community Services (CNCS)**
 - 12 Early Head Start home visitors, two rural communities
- **Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) E^xCITE**
 - District serves 31,000 students in 51 schools
 - Lincoln is mid-sized regional city of 225,000
 - **Student-Parent Program**
 - 4 high school child care centers
 - **Head Start/ Preschool Program**
 - 23 classrooms
 - Racially/ ethnically diverse (approx. 52% non-White)



Getting Ready Intervention

Intervention is administered via early childhood professionals in naturalistic contexts of home visits, socializations, and center activities.



Not a change in classroom curriculum, but a systematic way for educators to “give away” learning experiences to parents.

Collaborative Planning Strategies (*The Getting Ready Intervention*)

- Discuss an agenda and focus for visit collaboratively
- Share observations of parent-child interactions and ask for parent's observations
- Focus attention on and discuss child's strengths and developmental needs
- Prioritize concerns and discuss new learning opportunities (goals) for child
- Brainstorm strategies that can be used to meet learning goals between visits
- Continuously observe and reflect
- Develop a plan and “next steps”
- Follow up and evaluate how things are going



Professional Development and Support

Professional development efforts were paramount.

- All early childhood educators received general training via a structured training institute, booster sessions, on-going group and individualized coaching.
- Efforts were instituted to move professionals toward internalization and full conceptual integration of practices.

Professional Development and Support

Coaching followed a *reflective supervision* framework, whereby teachers/early childhood professionals were provided ongoing support and video-mediated feedback to continually set goals, improve skills, and enhance their use of family-centered services

- Individual sessions
- Group sessions



Individual and Group Coaching

Opening (10% of session)

Phase 1: Initiation - Clarify purposes, desired outcomes, and agendas for coaching.

Main Agenda (80% of session)

Phase 2: Observation and Action - Address teachers' and aides' use of intervention strategies in classrooms and home visits. Provide feedback, role play, and model when appropriate. Use short activities, self-monitoring, videos, and self-reflections as appropriate.

Phase 3: Reflection - Use reflective questioning and examples from professionals' work with families, mutual dialogue, and confirmation of strengths, challenges, and personal goals to guide the discussion and develop professional strengths in the use of triadic/collaborative strategies.

Closing (10% of session)

Phase 4: Evaluation - Plan ECPs use of triadic/collaborative strategies between coaching sessions.



Professional Development
What did we learn?

Study 1: A Case Study of Early Childhood Professionals in the Getting Ready Project

Brown, J.R., Knoche, L. L., Edwards, C.P., & Sheridan, S. M. (2009). Professional development: A case study of early childhood professionals in the Getting Ready Project. Special Issue: Professional Development in Early Childhood Programs. *Early Education and Development*, 20, 482-506.

Purpose of Study

The study was intended to:

- learn ECPs understanding of the intervention, including their perspectives on the professional development and supports received
- assess how the intervention was experienced by ECPs
- discern how self-reported attitudes and behaviors of practitioners towards work with families changed as a function of the professional supports they received.

How did we complete this study?

- Twenty-seven different early childhood professionals (ECPs) in the experimental group were interviewed (with 12 being interviewed twice at one year intervals), yielding 39 semi-structured interviews. ECPs were from Head Start, Early Head Start, and Student Parent Programs.
- Transcripts were coded by trained coders to (a) identify initial themes independently; (b) generate secondary themes; (c) identify and reach consensus about discrepancies.
- Overarching themes were those that were discussed by participants across locations, and were mentioned by at least 50% of participants.

What did we learn?

Three primary themes emerged from the interviews:

- *Self-Perceived Changes in Confidence and Competence in Enhancing Parental Engagement,*
- *Relationships as Supports for Change*
- *Practice: Time Pressure and Paperwork Woes*

Self Perceived Changes *in Confidence and Competence*

- ECPs experienced the professional development as a “spark” that helped promote internalization of a new belief system and way of working. ECPs put parents much more at the center of their work, along with children, and believed it made a great impact.



Relationships as Supports for Change

- Supportive relationships with coaches were felt by ECPs to be critical to the success of the parent engagement intervention



Time Pressure and Paperwork Woes

- Excessive reporting was encumbering, and lessening the paper load was an important part of the utility of professional development



What did we learn from Study 1?

- Over the course of involvement, early childhood educators described a movement from focusing on concrete aspects of the intervention (e.g., paperwork, time) → conceptual understanding (e.g., understanding all the components and how they fit together)
- From a focus on practice/motions (e.g., learning the ‘nuts and bolts’) → internalization of philosophy (e.g., recognizing that this form of practice is how they ‘go about’ their job)
- Continuity over time and job functions is important; conceptual and internalized understanding takes time and ongoing, consistent support

Study 2: Promoting Parent Partnership in Head Start: A Qualitative Case Study of Teacher Documents from a School Readiness Intervention Project

Edwards, C. P., Hart, T., Rasmussen, K., Haw, Y. M., & Sheridan, S. M. (2009). Promoting parent partnership in Head Start: A qualitative case study of teacher documents from a school readiness intervention project. *Early Childhood Services: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Effectiveness*. 3(4), 301-322.

The home visit reports and classroom newsletters submitted by 27 *Head Start* teachers in the Getting Ready Project were studied to as a source of *authentic evidence about their implementation of strategies intended to promote collaborative planning and problem-solving with parents around academic learning and social-emotional goals.*

How did we complete this study?

- A team of four researchers looked for qualitative evidence of incorporating *Getting Ready* strategies into their preparation of documents.
- We first reviewed all the documents we had, determined which were the most frequent categories:
 - *Home visit reports and classroom newsletters*

- Home visits were a focus of training and coaching, but newsletters were not the focus of the intervention.
- We realized that these documents would provide us with an unobtrusive window into teachers' implementation of Getting Ready strategies, and of generalization.
- We started reading them and realized they were a rich source of information, with much variation between individuals.

What did we learn from Study 2?

- The Home Visit Reports revealed 5 easily recognized categories of goals for collaborative planning with parents. This was the part of the report most carefully and consistently filled out:
 - *Academic Learning*
 - *Social-Emotional*
 - *Physical-Motor*
 - *Health and Nutrition*
 - *Adult-focused Goals*
- Reports of Experimental group teachers contained more extensive and detailed goal-setting around child-focused goals than did the files of Control teachers.
 - *For example, they included many more literacy activities and skills to be practiced and put much more specificity into social-emotional plans.*

The Classroom Newsletters revealed many strands that were easily grouped into 5 themes:

- *Important Information*, used equally by both groups
- *Parenting tips*, used more by Control teachers
- *Home-School Collaboration*,
- *Emotion-Focused*, and
- *Spotlights*, used more by Experimental teachers

- *Home visit reports provided evidence of experimental teachers implementing strategies learned through professional development– Getting Ready strategies of collaborative planning and problem-solving with parents around academic learning and social-emotional goals.*
- *Newsletters provided clear evidence of spontaneous change (hence, generalization) made by teachers on their own as they sought to strengthen home-school collaboration, form strong and trusting relationships, and spotlight and acknowledge child and parent competence.*

What are the implications for practice?

- *Relationships are vital* to the success of the implementation of a collaborative, research-based intervention;
- *Opportunities for reflection and processing are an important component* of the professional development model.



- *A long-term investment (more than one year) in the development of practitioners is important for a transformation of beliefs and perceived practices concerning work with families*
- *A collaborative partnership with the research team was valuable for the practitioners*
- *Everyday documents are useful research data of teacher uptake and generalization.*