

EFFECTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD-CONJOINT BEHAVIORAL CONSULTATION
(EC-CBC) ON PRESCHOOL CHILD COMPLIANCE

by

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Effects of Early Childhood-Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

on Preschool Child Compliance

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EFFECTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD-CONJOINT BEHAVIORAL CONSULTATION
(EC-CBC) ON PRESCHOOL CHILD COMPLIANCE

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University of Nebraska, 2004

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of a parent-teacher intervention program at improving compliance in preschool children (ages 3.5 - 5 years old). The intervention was an adaptation of *Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)* (Hembree-Kigin & McNeil, 1995) implemented within the context of Early Childhood-Conjoint Behavioral Consultation. Early Childhood-Conjoint Behavioral Consultation is defined as a structured, indirect problem-solving process, by which parents and teachers work together to identify a child's problem and apply interventions to improve parent-teacher congruence and child social behaviors (e.g., compliance). Five students participated in this research study.

The adapted PCIT used in this study added the preschool teacher as member of the intervention team. The intervention had two primary components: behavioral play therapy and compliance training for the child participants. A multiple-probe design across preschool participants was used in this study. Child behavioral response (i.e., compliance) and adult behavioral responses (i.e., commands, descriptions, reflections and praise) were targeted as outcome variables. Probe sessions of the outcome variables were conducted during baseline, treatment and follow-up phases for each child, parent and teacher participant.

All child participants demonstrated treatment gains in compliance behavior. A majority of participants maintained treatment gains in compliance at 9-day follow-up (4 out of 5 cases were assessed) and 2 to 4-week follow-up. Results indicate behavior gains appear to be related to intervention. In general, parents and teachers found consultation and early intervention procedures to be acceptable and effective. Consumer satisfaction measures suggested that the services offered by the consultant were satisfactory to the consultees.

PREVIEW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
LIST OF TABLES	6
LIST OF FIGURES	7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
CHAPTER	
I. LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction	10
Background Theory	
Eco-Behavioral Theory.....	13
Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC)	26
Early Intervention	30
Importance of Early Intervention	31
Early Intervention Consultation	34
Early Intervention Parent Training	35
Preschool Child Compliance	37
Parent-Child Interaction Therapy	43
Early Childhood Conjoint-Behavioral Consultation (EC-CBC)	48
Purpose of the Study	56
Research Questions	57
II. METHODOLOGY	58
Setting	58
Participants	58
Independent and Dependent Variables	70
Measures and Instruments	72
Procedures	80
Experimental Design	96
Data Analysis	100
III. RESULTS	102
Direct observations of Child Behaviors	102
Summary of Experimental Outcomes Across Participants	123
Behavior Intensity and Problematic Nature.....	124
Social Validity	126
Treatment Integrity of the EC-CBC Consultation Process	131

Integrity of the Intervention Procedures	131
Reliability	136
IV. DISCUSSION	139
General Findings	140
Unexpected Findings.....	143
Strengths and Limitations of the Study	149
Implications for Practice	159
Future Research Needs	160
REFERENCES	164
APPENDICES	
A. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	
B. CONSENT FOR CHILD AND CONSULTEE PARTICIPANTS	
C. CBC INTERVIEW FORMS	
D. CONSULTANT SCRIPT	
E. PRESCHOOL HOME-SCHOOL NOTE	
F. TREATMENT INTEGRITY BEHAVIORAL CHECKLISTS	

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Major Features of the Family Centered Model	19
2. Measurements and Instruments for Selection Child Participants	60
3. Participant Selection Results	68
4. Participant Pre and Post Intervention Perceptions of Behavior	69
5. Dyadic Parent/Teacher Child Interaction Coding System – II Operational Definitions	73
6. Pilot Study Mean Interrater Reliability	76
7. Additional Social Validity Scales	78
8. Research Design and Consultation Implementation Diagram	99
9. Objective Observation of Child Compliance with Parent and Teacher across Design Phases	106
10. Objective Observation of Parent and Teacher's Rate Per Minute (RPM) of Commands Used with Children across Design Phases	107
11. Objective Observation of Parent and Teacher's Rate Per Minute (RPM) of DRP Used with Children across Design Phases	108
12. Researcher and Objective Independent Observer Baseline Data Percent Child Compliance with Parents and Teachers	109
13. Parent and Teacher Ratings of Child Goal Attainment, Behavioral Intervention and Consultation	127
14. Intervention Integrity Results	133
15. Interrater Reliability Results	137

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Child Compliance (CO) behaviors across 5 child participants.	103
2. Parent Command (C) and DRP behaviors across 5 parent participants.	104
3. Teacher Command (C) and DRP behaviors across 5 teacher participants.	105

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

“Incorporating developmental theories and empirical findings into school consultation research and practice is essential to achieving the overall goal of promoting competent children and adolescents” (Hughes, 2000, p. 302).

However, “theory alone cannot inform and direct clinical actions. Advances in both theoretical and scientific bases must be considered in our ‘front line’ work with children. Theory and science together should guide clinician’s decisions” (Sheridan, 2000, p. 379).

A review of the literature regarding preschool child behavior shows that 7% to 12% of preschool age children can be identified as having emotional or behavioral disorders (Lavigne et al., 1998; Verhulst & Koot, 1995). This range is greater (6.5% to 57%) among children from low-SES backgrounds (Qi & Kaiser, 2003). Although seemingly common, without treatment these children will likely continue to experience behavioral difficulties. Many children who exhibit early social and behavioral needs are more likely to experience academic, social, or adaptive skill deficits (McGoey, Eckert & Dupaul, 2002; Qi & Kaiser, 2003). Externalizing behavior symptoms, including noncompliance, place children referred for treatment at risk for persistent, life-long psychosocial problems (Bennett, Lipman, Racine, & Offord, 1998; Campbell, Pierce, March, Ewing, & Szumowski, 1994). Meanwhile, early intervention has been found to be effective in preventing later social and academic problems (Guralnick, 1997; Webster Stratton, 1997), and young children are in an especially favorable situation for benefiting from early intervention (Dishion & Patterson, 1992; Ruma, Burke, & Thompson, 1996). Due to lack of research specifying effective elements of early intervention (Guralnick,

1997), the availability of appropriate treatment for young children with conduct difficulties is limited (Webster-Stratton, 1997). In addition, children may go untreated due to mistaken beliefs that children will outgrow behaviors. Although there are several interventions with positive evidence for improving oppositional and antisocial behaviors (Brestan & Eyberg, 1998), most of them have not been evaluated with preschool children. Therefore, the effectiveness of parent training delivered through alternative methods such as consultation (Reginald, Nixon, Sweeney, Erickson, & Touyz, 2003) and with younger children (Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson, 2001) are areas where additional research is needed.

Implementing behavioral consultation across environments is effective in improving social and academic skills for elementary-aged children. However, preschool-age children may experience confusion and unique behavioral problems as they transition from learning within their family system to learning in the school system. Therefore, it is especially important to implement effective consultation service-delivery models developed for preschool-age children.

There are at least, two factors in the field of early intervention that give cause for concern. First, there are few studies that delineate the underlying theory or philosophy of early intervention programs (Miller, 1991; Webster-Stratton, 1997). Second, the literature does not clearly define specific practices that are implemented within early intervention programs (Guralnick, 1997). It is suggested that young children with social and behavior problems may benefit from empirically supported intervention (Kamps & Ellis, 1995; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992) when implemented through consultation services across home and school settings (Qi & Kaiser, 2003, Sheridan et al., 2001, Sheridan &

Kratochwill, 1992). However, there is limited empirical research available regarding the implementation of intervention through consultation for preschool age children (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000).

The fields of school psychology consultation and early childhood intervention have histories of providing services to families and children with special needs. Many theories of social development underlie the practice of school psychology and early intervention. Specific theory related to school psychology includes eco-behavioral theory. Similarly, theories of developmental psychopathology relevant to early intervention research include social contextualism (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and transactional theory (Sameroff, 1975). This study reviews underlying theory that recognizes the child embedded in a ecological system and recognizes successful early intervention programs, which target the child's environment (i.e., parent and teacher responses) as well as the child's skills (Hughes, 2000). The purpose of this chapter is to articulate those theories and the coordinated research that contribute to an emerging area of research known as "early childhood-conjoint behavioral consultation."

To establish a partnership between school psychology consultation and early intervention research and practice, the usefulness of the primary theory underlying Early Childhood – Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (EC-CBC) will be elaborated. Therefore, the eco-behavioral theory underlying this early intervention consultation research is discussed. Because there may be a history of apprehension within the field of early intervention regarding behavioral theory (Wolery, 2000), an in-depth discussion of the behavioral components of EC-CBC is warranted.

Therefore, theory and research underlying an Early Childhood-Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (EC-CBC) model is identified in this introduction chapter. The remainder of the chapter will: (a) provide background information on conjoint behavioral consultation; (b) provide research in the area of early childhood education; (c) provide a model of early childhood conjoint behavioral consultation, and (d) describe the purpose of the study and research questions. For a list of abbreviations used frequently throughout the study see Appendix A.

Background Theory

Eco-Behavioral Theory

The framework of eco-behavioral theory is the social structure of the ecological system. Ecological systems theory indicates that each child is a part of a social system. The social system includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The *microsystem* includes the child, his unique characteristics, and family-child experiences within the child's immediate setting (e.g., parents, home, childcare providers, doctors, peers). The *mesosystem* is a system of microsystems that connects relationships between members of the microsystem (e.g., interactions among family [parent-child], school [consultant-teacher-parent]). The *exosystem* includes the direct experience of adults within the community in work or leisure activities and includes experiences in which the child is indirectly involved, such as external environmental occurrences (e.g., parental interactions with the larger culture, parental isolation, and emotional climate). The *macrosystem* includes the ethnic community and the larger "blueprint" or current values and practices of the community, culture, and society in which the child lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The levels of the ecological

systems are interrelated, and a change in one system influences the other systems and settings.

Keeping the family microsystem in mind, consider the impact of transition from family to school on preschool child behavior. According to family systems theory, child behavior problems during transition cycles are not always pathological (Minuchin, Colapinto, & Minuchin et al., 1998). They may be disturbed and transient. The preschool child's transition from home to school and from parent-child to teacher-child interactions may predict a problem in systems interaction that results in or highlights non-compliant behavior.

Rules of social systems may result in organized interactions and maintenance of stable systems because system-member behavior is defined. Informal rules lead to clarified expectations, defined roles and established consequences (Minuchin et al., 1998). However, when rules between home and school are inconsistent, the relationship between adults in the child's system or between adult and child becomes strained and difficulties can emerge.

When a child enters the preschool, the family system adjusts to the new "extended family" in the form of a preschool classroom, teacher, principal and other systems members. In a discussion of this family-school relationship, Epstein (1986) suggests that the interactions between parents and teachers (i.e., as a "pseudo family" rather than a professional relationship) become important in a child's life. A pseudo family is comprised of the school personnel who create a family-like atmosphere of acceptance rather than an atmosphere of professionally rigid attitudes (Epstein, 1986). In the area of early childhood intervention, it is especially important to develop consistent parental

adult patterns of interactions among children, their family of origin, and the school “pseudo family.” Congruence between these environments clarifies expectations for the child and leads to coordinated goals for the child between parent and teacher. By building communication, cooperation, and consistency between family (i.e., parents) and the school (i.e., teacher), researchers hypothesize that congruence between family and pseudo family will increase and create stability for the child’s social-emotional development.

Once the transition from home to school has begun, congruence between the home and school mesosystems contributes to positive child outcomes. According to Hansen (1986), home and school systems interactions influence the roles between families and schools. By examining the mismatch between the child, family and classroom relationships, Hansen found that there is an important relationship between discontinuity and the child’s academic outcomes. He concluded that relationships among mesosystems influence child outcomes and participation within the classroom.

Smith, Connell, Wright, Sizer, Norman, Hurley and Walker (1997) discussed the impact of mesosystemic factors (e.g., family, teacher, school and community) on family involvement. Through a path analysis design, they examined several areas of ecological systems that impact family involvement (e.g., family demographics, parent attitudes, and perceived teacher practice). Smith and colleagues found that parental background and attitudes, teacher practices, and school and neighborhood climate contribute to involving parents as collaborators in their child’s schooling (Smith et al., 1997). Their results indicate that an ecological model can be used to analyze the contribution of parental involvement factors to problems with child achievement at school.

Mesosystem interactions and the responsibilities of system members are key to the development of cooperative relationships (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). At the mesosystem level, there are several types of interconnections between home and school, such as multisystemic participation (e.g., parent-teacher meetings), inter-setting communication (e.g., parent-teacher dialogue) and inter-setting knowledge (e.g., parent and teacher training).

Each of these ecological levels influence adult relationships and child learning. Congruence across settings, parent involvement and participation, parent-teacher communication and child outcomes are affected by these system level interactions. Two ecological systems approaches that have been developed to address microsystem (adult-child) and mesosystem (family-school) interactions are the transactional regulation and family-centered approaches.

Transactional regulation theory. Transactional regulation theory focuses on the microsystem of the parent-child relationship and complements behavioral theory by identifying generalization as the ultimate goal. Self-regulation contrasts with other-regulation, and through adult interactions the child takes on increasing responsibility for his or her own behavior (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000).

This theory combines relevant theories of ecology with an understanding of family and culture and describes the transactional process that leads to child development problems. The outcome of the child's developmental problem does not reside within the child or the environment, but rather in a "complex function of the interplay of child and environment over time" (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000, p. 142).

According to this theory, a regulatory model integrates feedback mechanisms

between the individual child and the regulatory code across adults in the child's life.

These cultural codes provide the context of development for the child (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000, p. 156). Therefore, those who adhere to this theory would expect that children and parents behave as they do based on feedback or facilitation from others in systems adjunct to them. The transactional regulation theory "explains behavioral outcomes as the mutual effects of context on child and child on context" (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000, p. 136). For example, a child's demands or resistance may lead to mother anxiety, which can result in the mother perceiving the child as being "temperamental" or "difficult." This may lead the mother to avoid the child. As a result, the child may develop a problem with noncompliance.

There are three levels of intervention: (1) changes in the child's behavior, (2) changes in the parent's perceptions of the child, and (3) improvements in the parent's ability to take care of the child. These areas are labeled remediation, redefinition, and reeducation (Sameroff, 1986). *Remediation* is conducted when it is likely that the child's problem can be helped and the family and culture code will not interfere with remediation (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000). *Redefinition* occurs when there is a need for facilitation of more optimal parenting interactions through alteration of the parental (and in EC-CBC, teacher) beliefs and expectations. Redefinition is warranted when adults identify the child as abnormal and are unable or unwilling to provide normal care giving. Normalizing parental experiences through techniques of reframing and redirecting helps adults to appreciate their child's individual temperament (or learning needs) and helps distinguish current relationships from the parent's own upbringing. Identifying how current care giving activities will be appreciated engages the parent in positive interactions with the

child (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000). Parent *reeducation* is indicated when parents do not have the skills or knowledge for effective parenting. Reeducation refers to teaching parents how to raise their children and focuses on existing adaptive patterns while building upon the strengths of the family. These interventions focus on the immediate and momentary exchanges between parent and child that are associated with healthy development.

Sameroff and Fiese (2000) suggest that increasing parent satisfaction in their interactions with their child through reeducation would also redefine their attitudes and beliefs about the child (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000). The use of ecological and transactional regulation theory suggests that play can be used with young children, their family and their school to improve parent-child and teacher-child interactions. In addition, play can be used to change parent-teacher beliefs and to provide education about parenting and teaching the child. This transactional process needs additional research.

Family-centered approach. Due to Bronfenbrenner's introduction of the term "family centered" to early intervention in 1974, the practice of family-centered services emerged in the 1980's. This approach is an ecological research-based method of practice in early intervention that focuses on the family and early-intervention service provider relationship (Dunst & Trivette, 1987). Family-centered practices integrate the family empowerment philosophy with family support principles (Dunst et al., 1994). These services facilitate identification of family supports and strengths that address the child's needs as prioritized by the family (Dunst et al., 1994). The salient aspects of family-centered services are effective helping, empowering practices, and parent- professional

Table 1

Major Features of the Family-Centered Model

-
1. Adoption of social systems perspective of families to define interventions
 2. Movement beyond the child as the sole focus of intervention and toward the family
 3. Major emphasis on empowerment of families as the goal of intervention
 4. Proactive stance toward families that promotes growth producing behavior rather than treatment of problems or prevention of negative outcomes
 5. Focus on family *and* professionally-identified needs as targets of intervention
 6. Major emphasis on identifying and building upon family strengths to enhance family function
 7. Major emphasis on strengthening family social network and utilizing the network as a primary source of support and resources for meeting needs
 8. Shift and expansion in the roles professionals play in interactions with families and the performance of these roles
-

Note. From *Supporting and Strengthening Families: Methods, Strategies and Practices*, (p. 4), by C. J. Dunst, C. M. Trivette, & A. G. Deal, 1994, Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books. Copyright 1999 by Brookline Books. Adapted with permission.

collaborating and partnering. These premises provide the backdrop for early childhood conjoint behavioral consultation (EC-CBC). For more information on family-centered services the reader is referred to McWilliams and Harbin (1998); Dunst et al. (1994); and McBride, Brotherson, Joanning, Whiddon, and Demmitt (1993). For a brief review of the major components of this systems-ecological model see Table 1.

The basic philosophical attitudes and beliefs that underlie the use of family-centered early intervention services in the home were discussed in a study analyzing interviews with six professionals and respective families (McWilliam & Harbin, 1998). In this study, family-centered attitudes were described as the following: (a) understanding the child and the community in which they live; (b) professional responsiveness (e.g., building trust, talking about concerns); (c) friendliness (e.g., listening and encouraging); (d) sensitivity (e.g., offering practical help and conveying care and empathy for the child and parent); (e) positive attitude (e.g., showing enthusiasm for meeting small goals); and, (f) family orientation.

In a family-centered approach, a philosophy of enablement and empowerment is implemented through effective helping (Dunst & Trivette, 1987; Dunst, Trivette, Davis, & Cornwell, 1994). Effective helping involves listening to a parent's concerns, asking about their greatest concern, asking about awareness of options available to reduce or alleviate concerns, allowing parents to recognize a need for help in gaining resources to address the need, and helping parents access those resources with only as much support as is necessary. Effective helping then leads to empowerment, a process developed by forming partnerships, encouraging performance, and creating perceptions of control and influence (Dunst, Trivette, & LaPoint, 1994).

The process of empowerment may occur in the following way. First, the consultant listens, asks questions, and the family members learn to articulate and prioritize their concerns, demonstrate their competence in providing their perspective on the family's functioning, and identify their own needs. By supporting the family members as needed (e.g., identifying components consultees feel they can accomplish and those that someone else can help with or show the parent[s] how to do), the consultant allows the family members the opportunity to demonstrate their current level of skill in providing for their family. When allowed to act with competence, and make decisions for themselves, reciprocate caring and help to the service provider, family members display their competence over and over (Dunst et al., 1994). Through this process, family members attribute their positive situation and change in behavior to their own actions and decisions. As a result, each family member becomes empowered and feels more self-confident in making choices independently in the future when similar needs arise.

One limitation of ecological systems theory, is that it does not provide procedures to guide one through the process of implementing services focused on behavioral outcomes. However, behavioral theory explains observable relationship variables and processes that occur between a person and their environment (Wolery, 2000). In early intervention research and practice, some people may mistakenly perceive behavioral theory as a totally mechanistic model that is far from interactive (Wolery, 2000).

However, the proponents of eco-behavioral theory recognize that ideas and mental processes exist (Wolery, 2000); however, eco-behaviorists focus primarily on observable responses and their relationship to the individuals and systems of the environment.

In eco-behavioral theory, the traditional ideals of behavioral theory (e.g.,

modeling and reinforcement of appropriate social behaviors) are the primary methods of social learning implemented to facilitate positive social interaction. Eco-behavioral theory in consultation and parent training has been the underlying theory of much parent-teacher consultation research and practice. Ecological theory addresses the broader systems context of behaviors (Witt & Martens, 1983) which may be incorporated into an eco-behavioral framework. Traditional behavior therapy did not address interactions and interdependencies among the child, classroom environment, culture, family, and community (Christenson, Abery, & Weinberg, 1986; Knoff, 1984); the eco-behavioral theory addresses this concern.

Therefore, an eco-behavioral model of consultation provides a process for engaging parents and teachers in 1) analyzing the related systemic factors mentioned previously, 2) providing behavioral technology to parents and teachers through training programs and 3) engaging in problem solving for students across ecological systems of home and school through behavioral case consultation (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). In an eco-behavioral model, behavioral theory underlies traditional behavioral consultation (Kratochwill & Bergan, 1990; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992), and behavioral parent-teacher training models (e.g., Eyberg, 1988, Forehand & McMahon, 1981; Webster-Stratton, 1984).

Behavioral parent training. Behavioral parent training involves educating parents in groups or as individuals regarding some aspect of parenting for the child. Behavioral parent training includes training parents in using behavior management techniques to improve the parent-child relationship and to decrease problem behavior (Greco, Sorrell, & McNeil, 2001). Specifically, in behavioral parent training, parents implement methods