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Family/Partnership-centered Conjoint Behavioral Consultation: The Reconceptualization of a Model

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Background to Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

- The importance of working meaningfully and constructively with families in promoting a child's learning and adjustment is unequivocal. Home-school partnerships have been shown to relate to many positive outcomes for children, families, teachers, and schools.
- *Conjoint Behavioral Consultation* (CBC; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996) is a structured, indirect model of service delivery whereby parents and teachers are joined to collaboratively address needs and concerns of a child with the assistance of a consultant. Goals of CBC encompass those focused on addressing child needs, and developing home-school partnerships.
- CBC is procedurally operationalized via conjoint interviews (Problem Identification, Problem Analysis, and Treatment Evaluation) aimed at prioritizing shared concerns across home and school settings, evaluating factors contributing to the identified concern, developing an agreeable plan, and evaluating the child's progress toward goals.
- Traditional approaches to CBC emphasize a problem-solving orientation, aimed largely at addressing problems experienced by individual children.

CBC from a Family-Centered, Strengths-based Perspective

- Implicit in CBC is a goal toward strengthening support systems within a child's life; however, few mechanisms in the model are aimed specifically at this purpose.
- Family-centered approaches, including those that emphasize family empowerment, support families in proactively identifying needs, mobilizing resources, and accomplishing goals (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1994).
- *Family-Centered Services (FCS)* strive to help family members "become better able to solve problems, meet needs, or achieve aspirations by promoting the acquisition of competencies that support and strengthen functioning in a way that permits a greater sense of individual or group control over its developmental course" (Dunst, Trivette, Davis, & Cornwell, 1994, p. 162). Emphasis is placed on assisting families to access resources and use their own abilities in an empowering manner.
- From a family-centered perspective, CBC is conceptualized as "a framework for working with families and schools that promotes strengths and capacity building within individuals and systems, rather than focusing [only] on the resolution of problems or remediation of deficiencies" (Sheridan et al., 2004).
- CBC can be responsive to and address child needs as identified by parents and teachers; build skills and competencies within families and schools; and promote participation and collaboration among systems. Furthermore, it extends family centered approaches by acknowledging that children and families do not exist in a vacuum, and that children function *within and across systems*, which exert bidirectional and reciprocal influences over each other.
- To date, little conceptual work has been conducted that documents how CBC can be implemented within and extend a family-centered framework, while retaining the core goals, principles, characteristics, and procedural guidelines of each.

Family-Centered Services & Conjoint Behavioral Consultation: Shared and Unique Characteristics

Family-centered Services (Dunst &Trivette, 1994)	Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996)
Responds to Clients' Needs	
• Employs active and reflective listening	• Employs open-ended questions and frequent summarizations to ensure understanding
• Offers help that is congruent and matches the help-seeker's appraisal of needs	• Provides help that is congruent with consultees' (parents' *and* teachers') needs
• Helps family members clarify concerns and needs	• Guides parents and teachers in the determination of target behaviors and/or interventions; decisions are not made independent of parents' and teachers' priorities
	• Data collection and interventions based on what works in consultees' environments
Promotes Acquisition of Competencies	
• Promotes acquisition of family members' competencies to meet needs, solve problems, and achieve aspirations	• Focuses on existing skills, strengths, and competencies of parents and teachers
	• Creates opportunities for families and teachers to acquire knowledge to manage concerns (e.g., problem solving approach, data-based decision making strategies, specific interventions)
	• Encourages skills learned in CBC to generalize to future joint problem solving and decision making
	• Focuses on increased sense of self-efficacy and empowerment among parents and teachers
• Allows locus of decision-making to rest with the *family members*	• Promotes *joint responsibility* among home and school systems for problem and problem solutions
Promotes Partnership and Collaboration among Systems	
• Promotes partnerships and parent-professional collaboration as the mechanism for meeting needs	• Approaches systems work in a collaborative, positive and proactive manner
	• Involves collaborative problem solving across home and school
	• Assists parents *and* teachers in learning consistent and congruent strategies for working across systems to meet needs of the child
	• Focuses on common goals *across systems* rather than on problems within systems

Adapted from: Sheridan, S.M., Erchul, W.P., Brown, M.S., Dowd, S.E., Warnes, E.D., Marti, D.C., Schemm, A.V., & Eagle, J.W. (2004). Perceptions of helpfulness in conjoint behavioral consultation: Congruity and agreement between teachers and parents. *School Psychology Quarterly, 19*, 121-140.

Integration of "Family-centered Services" with Conjoint Behavioral Consultation: Stages, Goals, Procedures

Stage of CBC	Behavioral (Child) Goals/Objectives	Partnership Goals/Objectives
Needs Identification	▪ Jointly identify and define child's needs and priorities in behavioral terms. ▪ Jointly establish a procedure to collect baseline data across settings.	▪ Establish joint responsibility in goal setting and decision making. ▪ Establish/improve working relationships between parents and teacher, and between the consultant and consultees. ▪ Validate shared goals of supporting the child. ▪ Identify strengths of the child, family, and school. ▪ Increase communication and knowledge regarding the child, goals, concerns, and culture of family and school.
Needs Analysis	▪ Evaluate information collected across home and school. ▪ Collaboratively develop developmentally appropriate goals for priority behavior across home and school. ▪ Discuss what is happening before and after the priority behavior, as well as specific patterns that occur, during the focused time/setting. ▪ Collaboratively develop a plan built upon strengths and competencies to address the priority behavior across home and school. ▪ Reaffirm information collection procedures.	▪ Use inclusive language to strengthen partnerships between home and school. ▪ Encourage and validate sharing of parents' and teachers' perspectives of the priority behavior. ▪ Foster an environment that facilitates "give-and-take" communication across settings. ▪ Promote collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility for plan development.
Plan Implementation across Settings	▪ Implement agreed-upon intervention across home and school settings. ▪ Address questions, provide feedback, make immediate modifications to plan as necessary. ▪ Work toward changes in behavior or skills in the desired direction.	▪ Increase continuity in addressing child's needs across settings. ▪ Communicate about strategies as they are being implemented across home and school.
Plan Evaluation	▪ Determine if the goals for the priority behavior have been met. ▪ Evaluate what worked and what didn't. ▪ Discuss continuation or termination of plan. ▪ Schedule additional interview if necessary, or terminate consultation.	▪ Continue to promote open communication and collaborative decision-making across the home and school settings. ▪ Reinforce joint efforts in addressing needs. ▪ Discuss caregivers' and teachers' perceptions of the plan and process. ▪ Reinforce caregivers' and teachers' strengths and competencies for addressing future needs for the child. ▪ Establish means for caregivers and teachers to continue to partner in the future.

Revised CBC Forms from a Reconceptualized, Partnership-centered Perspective

Research Directions

- Systematic, empirical investigations are needed to identify specific procedural aspects of the model that may be most effective in enhancing a strengths-based, partnership-centered approach.
- In-depth analyses of procedural and verbal characteristics are required to determine the mechanisms by which CBC can be "partnership centered."
- Mixed methods studies that investigate outcome and process variables relevant to partnership-centered CBC are necessary, especially compared to outcomes and processes used in "traditional CBC."
- Longitudinal analyses would be useful to identify long-term effects on consultees' perspectives and behaviors.
- Analysis of family, school, and child variables as they relate to differential case outcomes (i.e., high vs. low effect sizes) is necessary.
- Careful analysis of the effects of a partnership-centered approach on the quality and quantity of engagement, empowerment, and collaboration are important.