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Susan M. Sheridan
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ssheridan2@unl.edu

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Families and Schools in Partnership: Creating Connections for Student Success

Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.
Department of Educational (School) Psychology &
Nebraska Research Alliance on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
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Why Family-School Partnerships?

"… parents take their child home after professionals complete their services and parents continue providing the care for the larger portion of the chid's waking hours… No matter how skilled professionals are, or how loving parents are, each cannot achieve alone what the two parties, working hand-in-hand, can accomplish together" (Peterson & Cooper, 1989; pp. 229, 208).

What Do We Mean by "Partnership?"

- A student-centered philosophy whose goal(s) are to:
  - Enhance success for students
  - Improve experiences and outcomes for children, including those that are academic, social, emotional, and behavioral in nature

Christenson & Sheridan, 2001

Families and Schools as "Partners"

- Central to the partnership model is a belief in shared responsibility for educating and socializing children – both families and educators are essential for children's growth and development inside and out of school
- Emphasis is on relationships, rather than roles… how families and educators work together to promote the academic and social development of students

Characteristics of Effective Partnerships

- Mutual interests and commitments to working together on behalf of the child's performance/achievement
- Frequent, positive, bidirectional communication
- Cultural sensitivity
- Perspective taking
- Clear and mutual roles
- Shared goals
- Co-constructed plans

Family-School Partnerships: Research Findings

- Students spend 91% of their time from birth-18 outside of school; once in school, they spend 70% of their waking hours outside of school
  - The impact of out of school time (e.g., messages about schooling, use of time, congruence with learning and developmental goals) must be acknowledged
- Generalization of social/behavioral gains occurs more readily when families are involved, and plans are implemented consistently across settings (Sheridan et al., 1990; Galloway & Sheridan, 1994)

General Research Findings

- Parents, regardless of educational level, income status, or ethnic background want their children to be successful in school (Christenson, 1995)
  - Across groups, parents want information about how schools function, child learning/developmetn, parent roles in supporting education

General Research Findings

- Home support for learning may help to differentiate between high and low achievers:
  - Barton & Coley (1992): Indicators of the home environment were used to predict mean achievement scores across 37 states and DC
  - 3 factors for which parents exercise authority explained 90% of the variance between high and low achieving states – student absenteeism, variety of reading materials in the home, excessive TV viewing

General Research Findings

- In a seminal review (Strong Families, Strong Schools, USDOE, 1994), *overwhelming* support for greater family involvement was found:
  - 40% of parents across the US believed they were not devoting enough time to their children's education
  - Teachers ranked strengthening parents' roles in learning as the issue that should receive the highest priority in education
  - 72% of students aged 10-13 said they would like to talk to their parents about schoolwork; 48% of 14-17 year olds agreed

Research Findings Related to Outcomes

In the presence of effective home-school partnerships, **students** have been shown to demonstrate:

- improvement in grades, test scores, attitudes, self-concept, behavior, social skills
- greater study habits and homework completion rates
- more engagement in classroom learning activities
- higher attendance rates and a reduction in suspension rates and discipline problems

Research Findings Related to Outcomes

In the presence of effective home-school partnerships, **teachers** have been shown to:

- become more proficient in professional activities
- allocate more time to instruction
- become more involved with curriculum
- develop more student-oriented rather than task-oriented activities
- receive higher ratings on teaching performance evaluations by principals
- indicate greater satisfaction with their jobs and request fewer transfers

Research Findings Related to Outcomes

- In the presence of effective home-school partnerships, **parents** have been shown to:
  - demonstrate greater understanding of the work of schools and positive attitudes about school
  - report increased contacts and communication with educators, and a desire for more involvement
  - improve their communication with their children, report improved parent-child relationships, and develop effective parenting skills
  - become more involved in learning activities at home

Research Findings Related to Outcomes

In the presence of effective home-school partnerships, **schools** have been shown to:

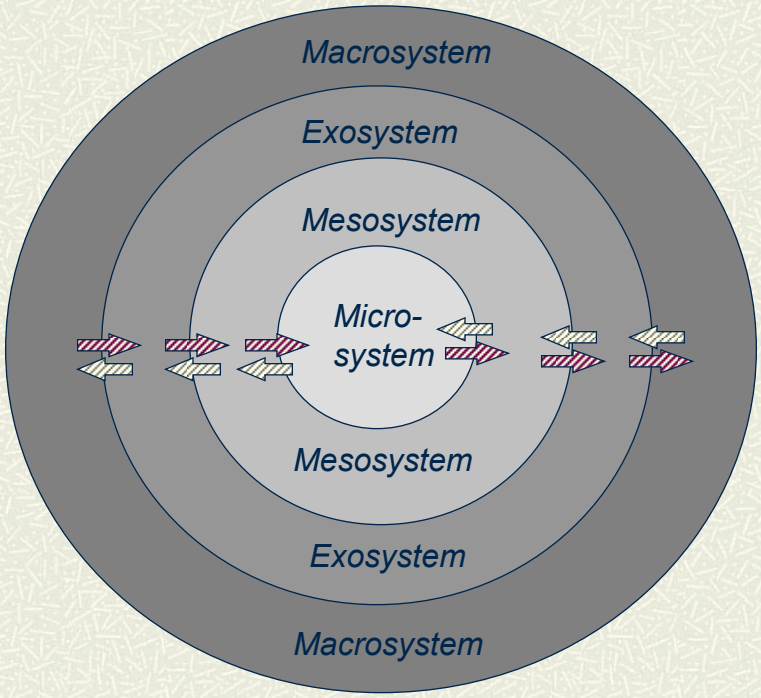
- receive higher effectiveness ratings
- implement more successful school programs

◈ *The database is generally correlational, and to attribute a causal link between family involvement and educational performance is premature at this time*

Family-School Partnerships: Theoretical Underpinnings

An effective, constructive family-school partnership occurs in an ecological context, with the student at center:

- Students, families and schools are all part of interrelated ecological systems within which a child resides.
- Partnership programs and services are focused on forging an effective match between the needs of an individual student, and strengths of the interfacing home & school systems.



The Importance of Continuity

- Difficulties occur when there is a mismatch, or borders, across one or more subsystems.
  - "Borders" between systems prohibit youth from connecting optimally with school (Phelan et al., 1992)
  - Children who experience borders (discontinuities) among home, school and peer/community worlds have the most difficulty making transitions across contexts and are at greatest risk for poor school performance and mental health concerns.
- Continuity across contexts (systems continuity) and over time (temporal continuity) are both critically important for positive learning outcomes.
- Interventions that create and sustain positive relationships/continuities for children *within* and *across* home and school contexts, over time, provide important ***prerequisite conditions*** for improving outcomes.

The Importance of Continuity

- ***Bridges*** (rather than borders or barriers) can increase students' chances of successfully navigating sometimes divergent settings.
- It is essential that we focus on ***building bridges*** for students by strengthening relationships and partnerships across systems (home-school-community) and promoting continuity in expectations, goals, and support for learning.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC):

Linking Research, Theory, and Practice

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation: A Definition

- A structured, indirect form of service delivery in which teachers and parents are brought together to collaboratively identify and address students' needs (Sheridan et al., 1996; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992)
- All stages of consultation (from needs identification to evaluation) are conducted in a simultaneous (rather than parallel) manner

CBC: A Definition

- A structured, indirect model that promotes and supports cross-system partnerships in the context of collaborative problem-solving.
- Teachers and parents are brought together to identify and address students' needs in a cooperative, constructive manner.
- The interconnections among systems are central, especially as they contribute to the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development of children.

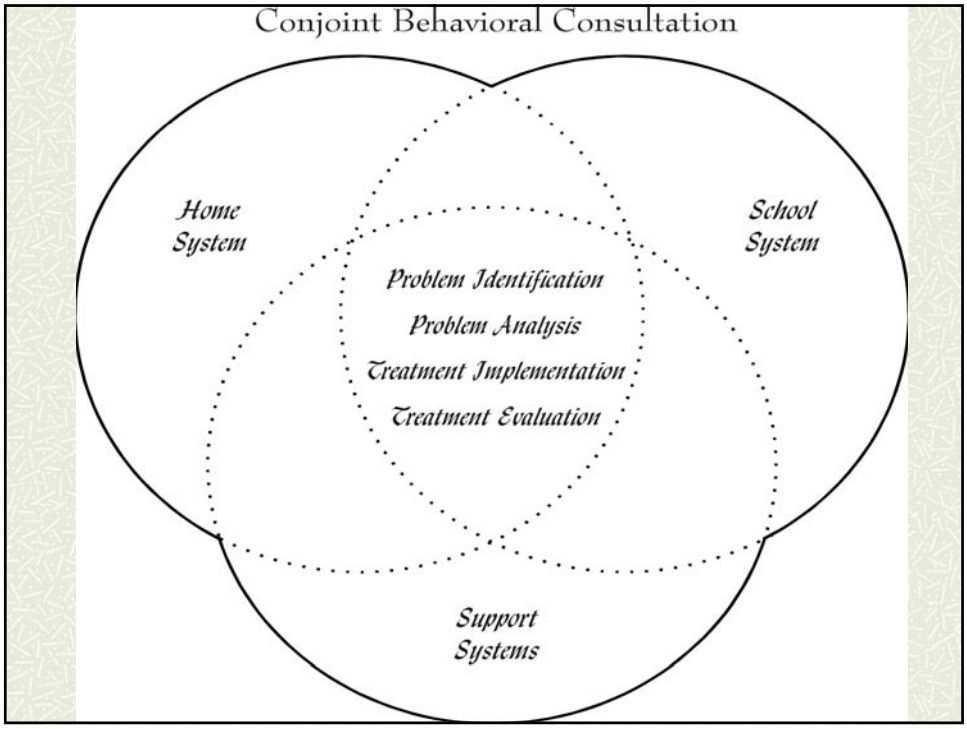
Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

Based on the assumptions that:

- Consistency and congruency in approaches, attitudes, and actions across home & school systems are important
- Structured, joint problem solving facilitates clear communication, shared goals, and congruent practices
- Conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC) is one vehicle by which to foster constructive, goal directed, solution-oriented family centered services and home-school partnerships

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

- Extends traditional consultation by going beyond the school setting, promoting and supporting *home-school partnerships* in the context of cooperative and collegial problem-solving
- Emphasizes meaningful parental/family involvement in education and effective home-school partnerships
- The bi-directional, reciprocal interconnections between home and school are central, especially as they contribute to the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development of children
  - Events, expectations, and attitudes in one setting/system affect all other systems



Conceptual Bases: Ecological-Behavioral Theory

- Combines the empirical technology of behavioral theory/analysis with the conceptual advances of ecological theory
- Allows for a comprehensive and functional understanding of a client's needs
- Recognizes the importance of broad-based data collection and cross-setting intervention
- Stresses the importance of looking at the entire system surrounding students, and the relationship and coordination among these systems

Stages of CBC Problem Solving

- Conjoint Problem/Needs Identification
- Conjoint Problem/Needs Analysis
- Conjoint Plan Implementation
- Conjoint Plan Evaluation

CBC Outcome Goals

- Obtain comprehensive and functional data over extended temporal and contextual bases
- Identify potential setting events that are temporally or contextually distal to target
- Improve skills and knowledge of all parties
- Establish consistent programming across settings
- Monitor behavioral contrast and side effects systematically via cross-setting treatment agents
- Develop skills and competencies for future conjoint problem solving
- Enhance generalization and maintenance of treatment effects

Outcome Goals of CBC

- Obtain comprehensive and functional data over extended temporal and contextual bases
- Identify potential setting events that are temporally or contextually distal to the target concern or behavior
- Improve the skills of all parties
- Establish consistent programming across settings
- Monitor behavioral contrast and side effects systematically via cross-setting treatment agents
- Develop skills and competencies for future conjoint problem solving
- Enhance generalization and maintenance of treatment effects

Outcome Research in CBC

- CBC has been found to be effective for socially withdrawn, academically underachieving, anxious, and socially unskilled children.
- A series of case studies and experimental designs have been employed to test the effects (e.g., Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Elliott, 1990; Galloway & Sheridan, 1993; Sheridan & Colton, 1994; Colton & Sheridan, 1998; Weiner, Sheridan, & Jenson, 1999)
- Research within early childhood settings has demonstrated positive effects of CBC related to school readiness (Sheridan et al., 2003)
- Research investigating the cultural validity of CBC is demonstrating positive outcomes with diverse families and students
- Research with middle school and high school students is being conducted to evaluate outcomes related to school completion (Schemm & Sheridan, in preparation)

Outcome Research in CBC

Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson (2001):

Objectives were to:

- Assist parents and teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities (or students at risk) who were being served in regular classrooms
- Evaluate competency-based consultation training and case outcomes using single subject methodology
- Begin to explore the effects and interactions of several variables (i.e., problem severity, client age, case complexity) as they relate to CBC case outcomes

Child Participants

- 52 students with disabilities or "at risk" of academic failure (for a total of 57 cases and 66 effect sizes)
- 67% males, 33% females
- Grade range = K-9; mean grade = 3.8
- Mean age = 9.4
- Ethnicity: 77% Anglo-American; 10% Hispanic; 13% "other" (African American, Native American, Asian)

Analyses

- Effect Sizes
  - Direct observations conducted to evaluate students' responses to interventions implemented in home and school settings
  - Average effect sizes (ES) computed for school and home
    - A statistical procedure that systematically pools results from several case studies and examines the benefit of CBC relative to baseline
    - Interpreted in standard deviation units
- Multiple Regression

  Examined relationship between client age, case complexity, symptom severity, and effect sizes
  - Case complexity: number of target behaviors addressed across home and school (1, 2 or more)
  - Symptom severity: the sum of severity ratings provided by parents and teachers prior to CBC

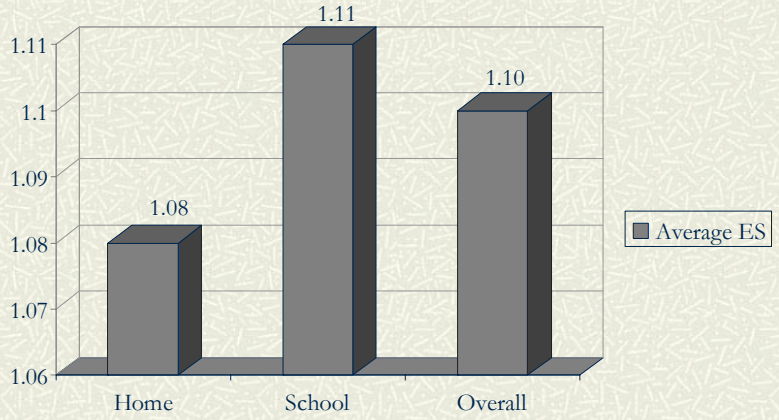
Analyses

- Social Validity
  - ***Consultation & intervention acceptability*** assessed with the Behavior Intervention Rating Scale-Acceptability factor
  - ***Subjective evaluation of outcome*** assessed with the BIRS-Effectiveness factor and Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS)
  - ***Consumer satisfaction*** assessed with the Consultant Effectiveness Form (CEF)

Results

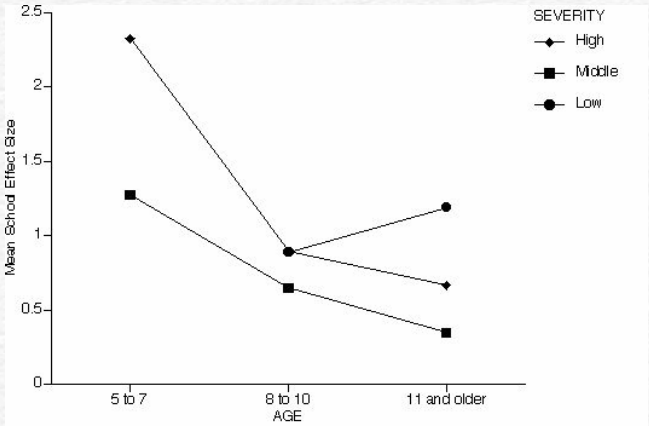
- Magnitude of ESs range = 1.08 – 1.11 (M = 1.10; SD = 1.07; CI = .83-1.36)
- At school, a regression model fitting client age and symptom severity predicted ES relatively well (R^2=0.425; Adjusted R^2=0.343; p=.008)
  - Older client with less severe symptoms or younger client with more severe symptoms experienced higher ESs with CBC
- At home, regression model was not statistically significant
  - Client age, symptom severity, case complexity were not predictive of home ESs

Average Effect Sizes Across Settings



Effect sizes are interpreted in standard deviation units;
According to Cohen, ES = .2 is small, .5 is medium, .8 is large

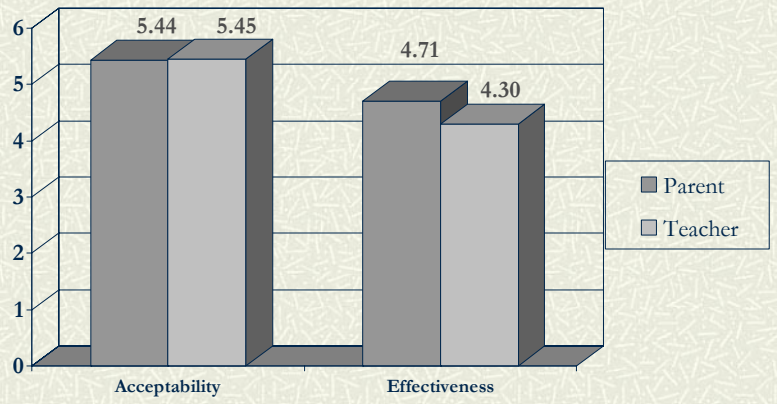
Regression Analysis



Results

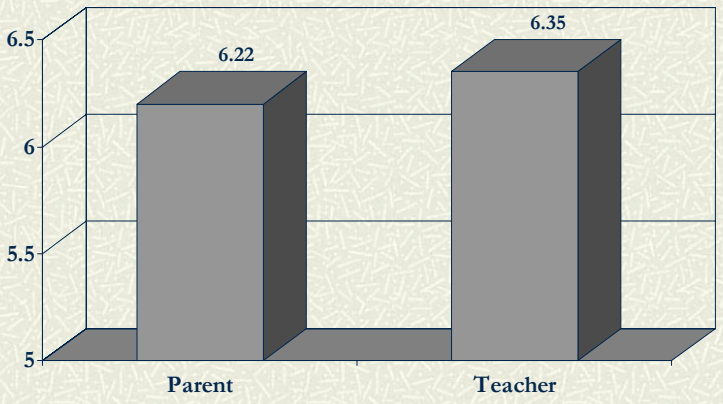
- Social validity assessments indicated that:
  - Consultee perceptions of the acceptability of CBC, assessed on the BIRS Acceptability factor, were very positive
  - Consultee perceptions of the outcome of CBC, as assessed on BIRS Effectiveness factor, were favorable
  - 100% of parents and 94% of teachers reported that goals were partially or fully met on Goal Attainment Scaling
  - Consultee satisfaction with CBC, assessed on the CEF, was very high

Acceptability and Efficacy of CBC:
Behavioral Intervention Rating Scale



Ratings based on a 6-point Likert scale, with
1 = not at all acceptable and 6 = highly acceptable

Satisfaction with Consultant:
Consultant Evaluation Form



Ratings based on a 7-point Likert scale, with
1 = highly dissatisfied and 7 = highly satisfied

Research Conclusions: Problem Solving Outcomes of CBC

- CBC appears to be an appropriate, effective, acceptable procedure to assist students with disabilities in general education classrooms
- The model may be especially beneficial when implemented with young children experiencing serious difficulties at school
  - Supports literature identifying the benefits of establishing meaningful parent-teacher relationships at an early age; early efforts may establish a pathway toward school success for children from a preventive framework
  - Older children with more severe difficulties may require more intensive intervention, such as direct involvement in establishing goals and plan strategies

Relational/Process Goals in CBC

- Improve communication and knowledge about child, family, and school
- Establish and strengthen parent-professional partnerships
- Increase commitments to shared goals
- Address concerns across, rather than only within, settings
- Promote shared ownership for identifying, prioritizing, and addressing concerns
- Promote greater conceptualization of child needs
- Increase the diversity of expertise and resources available

Process Research in CBC

- Recent research has begun to investigate the verbal processes and relational elements in CBC
- Communication research emphasizes three themes:
  - Process rather than content of communication
  - Messages are viewed in transactions rather than in isolation
  - The nature of the change in messages is examined over time
- Research investigating process goals of CBC also being conducted

Process Research in CBC

- An investigation of the social context/interpersonal dynamics in CBC (Sheridan, Meegan, & Eagle, 2002) found a high degree of affiliative exchanges between participants in CBC
  - Verbal exchanges in CBC serve to join participants together in an affiliative, cooperative interaction style
  - The social context in CBC is one that supports relationships among participants
  - Individual speech acts by consultants, parents and teachers are highly collaborative
  - Researchers concluded that CBC is composed of both task (problem solving) and process (relational/interpersonal) functions; analysis of either in isolation may actually misrepresent the complex nature and goals of CBC

Congruity Research

- Research by Sheridan, Erchul et al. (in press) investigated subjective evaluations in CBC and congruity between parents and teachers
- 118 children, 137 parents, 122 teachers, and 53 consultants participated in the study
- Outcome measures included parent and teacher ratings on the *Consultant Evaluation Form, Behavioral Intervention Rating Scale,* and *Goal Attainment Scaling*, and direct observations of child behaviors
- Analyses consisted of *difference scores* (i.e., depicting agreement/congruity) between parent and teacher ratings, and Pearson correlations between difference scores and outcomes

Measure	Mean
Teacher *CEF* (Satisfaction; Scale 1 – 7)	6.24
Parent *CEF* (Satisfaction; Scale 1 – 7)	6.14
Effect Size (above .80 considered high)	1.18
Teacher *BIRS* - Acceptability (Scale 1 – 6)	5.27
Parent *BIRS* - Acceptability	5.35
Teacher *BIRS* - Effectiveness	4.01
Parent *BIRS* – Effectiveness	4.61
Teacher Goal Attainment Scaling (1 – 5)	4.21
Parent Goal Attainment Scaling	4.35

Correlations Between Agreement and Outcomes

Effect Size	-.09
Teacher BIRS – Acceptability	-.12
Parent BIRS – Acceptability	-.24*
Teacher BIRS – Effectiveness	-.12
Parent BIRS – Effectiveness	-.26*
Teacher GAS	-.01
Parent GAS	-.07

Congruity Research

- Direct outcomes of CBC interventions yielded very high effect sizes
- Outcomes were very favorable regarding the social validity of CBC (i.e., acceptability, satisfaction, perceptions of efficacy and goal attainment)
- As agreement/congruity between parents and teachers decreased, so did parent and teacher acceptability of the process, and parents' perceptions of effectiveness
  - Other correlations were also negative, although not significantly so

Research Conclusions: Process Variables in CBC

- CBC provides one vehicle by which collaborative relationships across systems can be established and reinforced
  - Relational style among participants in CBC tends to be cooperative and affiliative
  - Anecdotal information suggests that through dialogue and shared problem solving, parents, teachers, and others may form a unique subsystem in a child's life, and co-construct new ways of supporting the learner
- Continuity between parents and teachers may be important for optimal outcomes
- More research is needed to understand specific roles and relationship variables in CBC.

For More Information or Correspondence:

Please contact me:

Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
239 Teachers College Hall
Lincoln, NE 68588-0345
ssheridan2@unl.edu