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Is Conjoint Behavioral Consultation Partnership Centered? An Exploratory Analysis

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Family-Centered, Strengths-Based Perspective

- The importance of working meaningfully and constructively with families in promoting a child's learning and adjustments is widely recognized.
- Families provide a context of informal education that supports the acquisition of many developmental skills necessary for future success of children in educational settings (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Sheridan, Eagle, & Dowd, 2004).

Family-Centered, Strengths-Based Perspective

- Families also have the potential to enhance educational outcomes by providing academic support, modeling effective practices, and demonstrating interest and expectations for educational pursuits.
- However, families often need support to develop competence and confidence in addressing social-emotional, behavioral, and academic concerns on behalf of the child.

Family-Centered, Strengths-Based Perspective

- Support can be facilitated through a strength-based, family-centered approach that builds upon families' strengths and existing competencies.
- *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).
- Although the importance of a family-centered approach is recognized, empirically supported family-centered consultation models have not been identified.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

- *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.
- CBC is comprised of four stages (Needs Identification, Needs Analysis, Treatment Implementation, and Treatment Evaluation), three of which are procedurally operationalized via conjoint structured interviews.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

- Specific aims of the process include 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.
- Goals of CBC focus on addressing the specific needs of the child, while working collaboratively with both the child's teacher and caregivers to strengthen home-school partnerships.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

- Research has demonstrated that CBC is effective in addressing the needs of children who are at risk for academic, behavioral and/or social difficulties (Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson, 2001).
- The focus of CBC research is now beginning to examine the process through which these outcomes are achieved.
- As such, inherent characteristics of the CBC process have been shown to closely parallel those of family-centered practices (Sheridan et al., 2004).

CBC as a Partnership-Centered Model

- Recently, CBC has *extended 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.
- 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.

CBC as a Partnership-Centered Model

- In combining a family-centered philosophy with the CBC model, a partnership-centered approach has emerged.
- From a partnership-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).

Research Questions

- The purpose of this study was to determine if evidence of partnership-centered principles can be identified within the CBC process.
- Research questions included:
 - ◆ 1) Do CBC consultants convey partnership-centered principles in CBC case interviews with parents and teachers?
 - ◆ 2) What consultant variables relate to the use of partnership-centered principles?

Methods

■ Sample:

- ◆ 15 cases with full outcome data were randomly selected from an existing data base of cases conducted between 1995 and 2004.
- ◆ 45 separate interviews were coded in all, with 33% of those cases coded for inter-rater reliability.
- ◆ Interviews were randomly assigned to a team of 8 coders who had been trained to mastery in the CBC process.

Methods cont.

- Procedures:

There were three stages within the coding process:

1. Theme Identification
2. Scale Development
3. Reliability Training

Theme Identification

- The following materials were used to guide the development of a partnership-centered coding framework:
 - ◆ *Family-Centered Practice Indicators* (McWilliam, Maxwell, & Sloper, 1999)
 - ◆ *Helpgiving Practices Scale* (Trivette & Dunst, 1994)
 - ◆ CBC Process Goals (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996)
- Based on sample items derived from these materials, partnership-centered categories were created using theme identification techniques.

Theme Identification cont.

- Items derived from these materials were used to generate thematic clusters of partnership-centered categories by each individual in the research team.
- The collective list of identified themes was then narrowed down via group consensus.
- The utility of the thematic clusters was assessed by coding an actual case interview to identify exemplar consultant statements.

Theme Identification cont.

- The following list of partnership-centered themes was derived from this process:
 - ◆ Focuses on Strengths
 - ◆ Teaming and Collaboration
 - ◆ Encourages
 - ◆ Sensitive and Responsive
 - ◆ Effective Communication
 - ◆ Skill Development
 - ◆ Resourceful and Shares Information

Scale Development

- The following rating scale was developed to determine the consultant's effectiveness at using the partnership-centered themes within the context of an interview.
 - ◆ 1 = Totally ineffective, it could not have been worse.
 - ◆ 2 = Mostly ineffective, it could have been a little worse.
 - ◆ 3 = More ineffective than effective.
 - ◆ 4 = More effective than ineffective.
 - ◆ 5 = Mostly effective; could have been a little better.
 - ◆ 6 = Totally effective; it could not have been better.

Scale Development cont.

- To assess the utility of the rating scale, four coders independently rated a sample CBC interview.
- Based on group discussion of the rating process, a coding framework was developed that included rating guidelines.

Scale Development cont.

- Coding Rules:
 - ◆ Code each theme based on the opportunities perceived to be present in the interview relative to opportunities utilized by the consultant.
 - ◆ Rate consultant's ability to *convey a tone* or *climate* reflective of the theme, rather than the frequency of use.

Reliability Training

- A master key of effectiveness ratings was developed by advanced research members for two sample interviews.
- Coders were trained until they reached 85% agreement with the master key.
- Ratings were considered reliable if they were within one effectiveness rating of each other (e.g., 4 – 5 = reliable; 4 – 6 = not reliable).

Analysis

- Mean effectiveness ratings for all cases were averaged across all themes to derive a total “Partnership-Centered Theme” (PCT) score for each interview.
- Interviews within a case were averaged to derive a total case score.
 - ◆ The case score results were rank ordered and clustered into three quantitative groupings.
 - ◆ The highest and lowest cases were selected for further analysis.
- Correlations were also computed between partnership-centered scores and consultant variables (i.e., age, experience).

Results

- Descriptive statistics were computed with the following results:
 - ◆ Total mean PCT score = 3.97
 - ◆ Standard deviation = 1.15
 - ◆ Range of PCT scores = 3.0 – 5.14
- Frequency and percentage of each rating for the total sample was computed.
- Table 1 presents the total number of times each rating was chosen out of the total number of possible opportunities (i.e., total = 315).

Table 1

Effectiveness Rating	Frequency	Percentage of Total Ratings
1 = Totally ineffective	4	.01%
2 = Mostly ineffective	32	10%
3 = More ineffective	69	22%
4 = More effective	100	32%
5 = Mostly effective	85	27%
6 = Totally effective	25	8%

Results cont.

- Results for each case were rank ordered into three groupings by rounding the PCT score to the nearest whole number.
- 12 out of the 15 cases (80%) were considered to be more effective than ineffective.
- Of these 12 cases, 27% were considered to be mostly effective.

Table 2

Effectiveness Rating	Range of PCT Scores	Number of Cases
5 = Mostly effective	4.62 – 5.14	4
4 = More effective than ineffective	3.52 – 4.24	8
3 = More ineffective than effective	3.0 – 3.24	3

Results cont.

- A significant positive correlation was found for consultant partnership-centered scores and consultant experience ($r = .465$; $p < .05$).
- Consultant exemplar statements from the highest and lowest cases were selected and will be further described in the following case examples.

Case Study Example: “High” Partnership-Centered Case

■ Background Information

◆ Child

- ◆ “Elizabeth”
- ◆ 7 year-old Caucasian female
- ◆ 1st grader at a Midwestern Catholic School
- ◆ Both parents involved in consultation

◆ Consultant

- ◆ 24 year-old Caucasian female
- ◆ Previous experience with consultation

Plan Development

- Target Behavior
 - ◆ Compliance with initial instructions
- Home Intervention
 - ◆ Morning Routine
 - ◆ Self-monitoring sticker chart
 - ◆ Positive reinforcement
- School Intervention
 - ◆ Class wide behavior plan
 - ◆ Consistent delivery in instruction
 - ◆ Praise

Partnership-Centered Rating

- Interview Averages
 - ◆ CNII = 4.86, Mostly Effective
 - ◆ CNAI = 5.29, Mostly Effective
 - ◆ CPEI = 5.29, Mostly Effective
- Combined Interview Average
 - ◆ 5.14, Mostly Effective, could have been a little better
 - ◆ Ranked 1st out of the 15 interviews

Partnership-Centered Practices

- Focuses on Strengths
 - ◆ Provided a rationale for discussing and building upon Elizabeth's strengths.
 - ◆ Developed a plan based on Elizabeth's strengths, as well as the family and school.
 - ◆ Validated and included consultee's ideas in goal selection and plan development.
 - ◆ Shared observations on Elizabeth's progress and how well she was doing.

Partnership-Centered Practices

- Teaming and Collaboration
 - ◆ Promoted joining between environments (e.g., “us” and “we” statements).
 - ◆ Shared common themes between home and school.
 - ◆ Elicited parent and teacher ideas.
 - ◆ Plan development consisted of ideas from the entire team.
 - ◆ Attributed Elizabeth’s success to parent and teacher collaboration.

Case Study Example: “Low” Partnership-Centered Case

■ Background Information

◆ Child

- ◆ “Harry”
- ◆ 10 year-old Caucasian male
- ◆ 5th grader at a Midwestern Catholic School
- ◆ Mother present in consultation interviews

◆ Consultant

- ◆ 28 year-old Asian American male
- ◆ Initial experience with consultation

Plan Development

- Target Behavior
 - ◆ Home: Completing chores
 - ◆ School: Prompts to redo unsatisfactory assignments
- Home Intervention
 - ◆ Chore Checklist
 - ◆ Positive Reinforcement
- School Intervention
 - ◆ Self-Monitoring Checklist
 - ◆ Assignment Book
 - ◆ Home Note with Positive Reinforcement

Partnership-Centered Ratings

- Score for Interviews
 - ◆ CNII = 1.85, Mostly Ineffective
 - ◆ CNAI = 5.0, Mostly Effective
 - ◆ CPEI = 2.14, Mostly Ineffective
- Combined Interview Average
 - ◆ 3.0, More Ineffective than Effective
 - ◆ Ranked 15th out of 15 cases

Partnership-Centered Practices: Missed Opportunities

- Sensitive and Responsive
 - ◆ Reframing consultee's statements to convey a more positive tone.
 - ◆ Responding more sensitively to consultee's feelings, frustrations, and concerns regarding Harry.
 - ◆ Incorporating consultee's ideas with plan development.
 - ◆ Checking with consultees to ensure they were comfortable with the process and agreed with consultant suggestions.

Partnership-Centered Practices: Missed Opportunities

- Encourages

- ◆ Facilitating consultee decision-making throughout the consultation process.
- ◆ Allowing the consultees to discuss their ideas and concerns.
- ◆ Validating the expertise of the consultees.

Discussion

- This was the first *exploratory* study of its kind to examine the effectiveness of CBC consultants in utilizing a partnership-centered philosophy.
- The findings indicate that the majority of the consultants were more effective than not in creating a climate that would promote a partnership between home and school settings.
- The results also suggest that experience may play a role in a consultant's ability to cultivate a partnership-centered context.

Limitations and Future Directions

- Results of this study must be interpreted with caution due to the following limitations:
 - ◆ Psychometric adequacy of the measures developed for this study is unknown.
 - ◆ Factor analyses of the partnership-centered themes, as well as the reliability and validity of the measures used for this study, is necessary.
 - ◆ Small sample size limits the external validity of the results.
 - ◆ Replication with a larger sample is needed to substantiate the findings of this study.

Limitations and Future Directions

- Correlational analysis of PCT scores and case outcomes was not conducted.
 - ◆ Investigations identifying relationships between partnership-centered themes and outcome measures are necessary.
 - ◆ Examples of case outcomes include:
 - ◆ Effect sizes
 - ◆ Consultee perception of effectiveness and acceptability of CBC
 - ◆ Satisfaction with CBC process and consultant
 - ◆ Consultee perception of goal attainment

Limitations and Future Directions

- Interviews were coded by independent external observers and no data were collected on participant perceptions of the “partnership-centeredness” of the interviews.
 - ◆ Although this is an important research standard, perceptions of parents and teachers who participated in the process should be investigated.
- Only structured CBC interviews were coded; many other interactions between consultants and consultees were missed.
 - ◆ Partnership-centered approaches and CBC practices extend beyond the structured interviews and include informal contacts, “check-ins,” and other direct participation of consultants in natural, day-to-day contexts.

Limitations and Future Directions

- Contextual and participant information is necessary in interpreting the use and effectiveness of partnership-centered strategies.
 - ◆ Relationships between participant/contextual characteristics, or effects of these variables on PCT scores, could be explored in future research.
 - ◆ Examples of Contextual/Participant Characteristics:
 - ◆ Ethnicity, SES, language, age, gender, other participant demographic variables
 - ◆ Age, gender, ethnicity of child
 - ◆ Nature, severity, chronicity of target behavior
 - ◆ Intervention plan components and effectiveness of plan
 - ◆ History of parent-teacher relationship

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