Getting Ready: Promoting School Readiness through a Relationship-Based Partnership Model

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School readiness is determined by the life experiences of young children between birth and enrollment in formal education programs. Early intervention and education programs designed to promote school readiness often focus on skills a child fails to demonstrate that are believed to be of importance to social and academic success. The Getting Ready model of early childhood intervention recognizes the transactional nature of young children's development and the important role parents play in preschool readiness and school-age success. In the Getting Ready model, collaborative partnerships between parents and professionals are encouraged to promote parent's competence and confidence in maximizing children's natural learning opportunities, and preparing both parents and children for long-term school success. Parent-child interactions in everyday experiences, mutual observations, and goal-directed problem-solving, and young
children's successful development constitute the input, processes, and outcomes of the Getting Ready model. The empirical rationale for and specific components of the model are described, with practice implications embedded throughout this paper.

**Key Words:** school readiness, relationships, parent engagement, tridac strategies, collaborative partnerships

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**Introduction**

Academic success for many children is predicated on their preparation in the early school years (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005; Snow, 2006). For example, children who are poor readers at the end of first grade are also likely to be poor readers at the end of their fourth grade year (Juel, 1988). Children's abilities to name letters of the alphabet are highly correlated with their 10th grade performance on standardized tests of reading comprehension (Stevenson & Newman, 1986). The ability to execute simple mathematical computations are stalled if basic spatial, movement, numerical, and categorical concepts are not established in the first years of school (Clements & Sarama, 2007). Indeed, success in the primary grades forecasts success in later grades. However, it is now well established that children's abilities in the first 3 years of school are dependent on the cognitive, linguistic, and social competencies they bring to instruction from their experiences prior to school entry (Dalc, Jenkins, Mills, & Cole, 2005; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Weikart, Bond, & McNeil, 1978).

Studies of children's development consistently point to the importance of early opportunities and experiences as the fundamental precursors to optimal outcomes later in life. Developmental pathways across academic, social-emotional, and behavioral domains in the K-12 years are readily traced to antecedents dating back to the period from birth to age 5 (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Particularly in the context of children growing up in disadvantaged environmental conditions (e.g., low income), social and educational policy now clearly indicate that intentional, high-quality early learning experiences contributing to the development of academic, social, and other school-related skills are expected in early childhood programming (Committee for Economic Development, 2002). State and federal mandates requiring heightened standards for public preschools, teacher preparation, and quality programming are increasingly being instituted in efforts to promote economic and social benefits for all children. Furthermore, many professional organizations and research initiatives routinely recognize the critical importance of the earliest life experiences of young children, and the fundamental nature of secure relationships as the foundation upon which optimal learning occurs (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997; Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005).

The purpose of this paper is to describe the empirical foundation for and structural features of a relationship-based model to promote school readiness in young children and their families. The Getting Ready model was developed and is being empirically tested as part of a large-scale longitudinal study, with a primary aim of uncovering effective methods for promoting school readiness among low-income children aged birth to 5. In this paper, we describe the conceptual framework, empirical foundation, and procedural details of the Getting Ready approach. The Getting Ready model was designed to provide an integrated, ecologic, strengths-based approach to school readiness for families with children from birth to 5 years of
age who are participating in home- and center-based early education and intervention programs. The model is grounded in family-centered principles, evidence-based early intervention strategies, and collaborative structures. It is constructed on the foundational belief that optimal school readiness for children and their families occurs through the development of positive relationships within the multiple interacting ecologic systems of the home (i.e., parent-child relationships) and between the home and other supportive environments (i.e., parent-professional relationships). In our conceptualization of school readiness, children must develop certain capacities to be “ready” to participate in formal schooling; however, parents and other caregivers must be ready to develop positive work relationships and partner with educational professionals to ensure consistent cross-setting supports, encourage ongoing stimulation, and promote positive developmental outcomes in children.

**Parent-Child School Readiness**

School readiness traditionally has been defined in terms of a young child’s competencies at the time of school entrance (i.e., at 5 or 6 years of age; Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Snow, 2006), with limited focus on family readiness for school. School readiness programs have often focused on preparing young preschool-age children with the skills believed to be necessary for successful participation and learning in kindergarten and first grade. In light of the current legislative landscape and federal initiatives such as Good Start Grow Smart (2002), this focus has become increasingly important and relevant as early education programs are held accountable to demonstrate specific skill development in children they serve (Harbin, Rous, & McLean, 2005; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002).

The mechanisms through which these specific school readiness skills can be supported, however, has been the subject of debate for many years (Vernon-Feagans & Blair, 2006). The suggestion in many school readiness programs is that the child alone is responsible for his or her school success. In this situation, early childhood educators provide the foundational experiences for children, and children in turn are expected to develop the necessary skills to demonstrate success upon school entry. From this perspective, when a child is deemed lacking necessary competencies prior to school entrance, it may follow that he or she should be the focus of systematic curricular attention or even “intervention.” Approaches to early childhood intervention historically have been child centered, wherein teachers and other service providers worked directly and sometimes exclusively with children (Ma­honey & O’Sullivan, 1990) and only indirectly or tangentially with parents. School readiness skills emerged primarily as a function of instructional experiences delivered outside the home. The critical role of instruction to promote a child’s competence and successful school entry rested on school-based experiences with minimal emphasis on the role of family in child learning.

In recent decades, however, theoretical and empirical advances, as well as professional directives, have called the unidimensional (child-only) approaches into question. Specifically, ecologic theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) posits that the proximal and distal context (i.e., ecology) within which children live and develop, including events and factors affecting their caregivers and environmental supports, have a significant influence on their overall functioning. This complex ecology includes children’s day-to-day experiences, interactions, and relationships with family, friends, parents, and other caregivers. Ecologic theory considers child development within the context of interacting systems including the child, peers, adults, learning environments, community agencies, policies, and a host of multilevel agents that influence and are influenced by one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

A growing empirical base supports a multidimensional, family-inclusive approach
for promoting child and family readiness for school. First, greater intervention effects on children and families have been found when public early intervention programs (e.g., Early Head Start) make intentional efforts to work directly with parents than when programmatic supports are delivered to children only (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Love et al., 2003). Second, developmental outcomes attained by children with biological concerns have been shown to be more related to parent and family status (e.g., education, social supports) than their own medical status (Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). Third, Dunst and colleagues (Dunst, 1985; Dunst, Trivette, & Cross, 1986) have reported on a number of studies finding that children's rates of development during intervention had little relationship to the type or amount of services they received, but rather to the number and quality of parents' social and family-centered supports. Finally, professional groups such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Council for Exceptional Children-Division for Early Childhood (DEC), and the National Governor's Association (NGA) have provided a growing professional context for changes in the way early childhood services are conceptualized and delivered. For example, the NGA Task Force on School Readiness (2005) promoted a set of principles recognizing that "the family plays the most important role in a young child's life," and that "responsibility for school readiness lies not with children, but with the adults who care for them and the systems that support them" (p. 1). Similarly, the NAEYC bases its guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices on values that appreciate and support the close ties between the child and family, and recognize that children are best understood in the context of family, culture, and society. Furthermore, DEC's recommended practices for services to children birth to age 8 with disabilities or developmental delays outline both the importance of families and professionals sharing responsibility for children's intervention programs and outcomes, and the ways family-centered approaches can advance children's development.

Definitions of school readiness framed within an ecologic orientation have been offered by Dunst (2007) and Mashburn and Pianta (2006). Specifically, Dunst describes school readiness as the "formal and informal experiences and opportunities afforded children by different people and settings that support and strengthen their acquisition of skills and competencies needed to perform well in school" (p. 4). Mashburn and Pianta (2006) indicate school readiness is a "product of the ecologies within which children are embedded that support their development . . . a set of interactions and transactions among people (children, teachers, parents, other caregivers), settings (home, school, and child care) and institutions (communities, neighborhoods and governments)" (p. 152). This conceptionalization includes strong early education programming, but incorporates a larger system of players to promote children's skill development. This broader view of school readiness emphasizes the multiple systems of input (environments and resources that provide enriching learning opportunities) and processes (interactions and mechanisms that promote children's acquisition of skills), and transactions among these systems, to create contexts for children's developmental outcomes and skills (the products of learning opportunities and supports). These inputs, processes, and outcomes need to be considered when organizing a program of early intervention for a population of children and/or families "at risk" for poor transition to the formal education systems in their communities (Dunst, 2007).

We conceptualize getting ready for school in terms of relationships among the child, family, school, and caregiving community, and their interactions with one another. The process of getting ready happens naturally for many families as part of routine daily activities and learning opportunities. For some families, however, the process requires extra attention and guidance due to the presence of child and family risk factors, the composite of which increases the challenges these families face (Sameroff, 2000).
The focus of early education and intervention programs can capture a broad definition of school readiness by advancing children's competencies and readiness skills within two relational contexts simultaneously: the parent-child relationship (and the quality of interactions between parent and child), and the parent-professional relationship (the parent in partnership with their child's educators and other professional caregivers). Below we review the empirical evidence supporting these relational elements as they support effective school readiness for children and parents, followed by the specific details of an integrated intervention model currently being delivered and tested in a large-scale randomized trial.

**Empirical Evidence for Parent-Child Engagement and School Readiness**

To effectively promote parent-child school readiness, parents must be active agents in support of their children's development. Parental engagement in young children's learning is highly predictive of children's developing competence in cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral domains. General qualities of children's earliest relationships with parents set the stage for later competence in preschool and school settings (Bornstein & Tamis-LeMonda, 1989; de Ruitcr & van Uzendoorn, 1993; Raver & Kritzner, 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Thomson, 2002). Qualities of parental engagement have been linked to a number of adaptive characteristics of children in preschool and at kindergarten entry, such as good work habits, frustration tolerance, fewer behavior problems, and better social skills. Collectively, studies strongly support the conclusion that children's early relationships and everyday interactions impact their adjustment across persons (mother, teachers and other professionals, peers, contexts (home and school), and time (preschool and kindergarten) (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997).

A seminal study of early child care conducted by the NICHD (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002) investigated the experiences of 1,216 families over the child's first 3 years of life and found certain parent engagement behaviors related to social and cognitive outcomes for children. This study, along with others, found that parental warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness, and support for a child's emerging autonomy were parent behaviors highly predictive of children's socioemotional and cognitive development. Furthermore, active and meaningful parental participation in language- and literacy-related activities with young children have been reported as important in facilitating optimal school readiness and success (Arnold, Loeblan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Espinosa, 2002; Pan, Rowe, & Singer, 2005; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006; Wood, 2002). Collectively, a three-dimensional model of parenting, composed of responsibility (including autonomy support), home and parent support for learning, and control/discipline, has been validated by Hindman and Morrison (2007), with significant relationships to children's social and academic learning.

1. **Parental warmth, sensitivity and responsiveness.** Parent's contingent responsiveness to children's cues and their emotional warmth and availability have been positively related to the development of secure relationships in young children in numerous studies over the past 30 years (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1972; Emde & Robinson, 2000; Guralnick, 2006; Landry et al., 2001, 2006; Mitchell, 1987). Warm interactions of the mother provide the foundation for compliance and internalized controls in young children (Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Lecuyer & Houck, 2006; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Conversely, limit-setting and discipline may be less effective in the absence of positive, warm relationships (DeKlyen & Speltz, 2001; DeKlyen, Speltz, & Greenberg, 1998; Sutton, Cowen, Crean, & Wyman, 1999). A parent's emotional availability is associated with the degree to which very young children explore their environments (Sorce & Emde, 1981).
such as through extended play episodes and pretend play (Slade, 1987). The parent's expression of positive affect and emotional availability are also associated with children's improved short-term cognitive and language skills (Clarke-Stewart, 1973; Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, & Baumwell, 2001) and long-term positive academic performance (Downer & Pianta, 2006; Estrada, Arsenio, Hess, & Holloway, 1987), as well as their abilities to relate to other children (Schmidt, DeMulder, & Denham, 2002) and their reading acquisition (Merlo, Bowman, & Barnett, 2007). Bronwich (1997) and Epps and Jackson (2000) emphasized the importance of parents (a) remaining emotionally available to their children; (b) reading accurately their children's behavioral cues for attention and care (e.g., smiles, signs of discomfort or distress, expression of feelings); (c) responding contingently and appropriately to these cues; and (d) showing clear, positive affect in most social interactions with their children. These behaviors continue to be recognized as key influences in young children's competence in the early years of life.

2. Parental support for child's autonomy. A second aspect of parent engagement refers to parental behavior that helps children negotiate tasks that challenge their mastery motivation, frustration tolerance, self-control, and attention span. Parents can teach and model skills that help children explore the environment and recognize and express their own feelings. Parenting through joint planning, negotiation, use of appropriate commands in limit-setting, and anticipatory guidance help children gain control of their environment in a supportive rather than authoritarian manner. Furthermore, support for children's autonomy is the process by which parents facilitate children's individuation and self-competence (Clark & Ladd, 2000). Parents' abilities to provide developmentally sensitive support for autonomous problem-solving have been associated with increased levels of cognitive competence in young children (Conner & Cross, 2003; Mulvaney, McCartney, Bub, & Marshall, 2006; Wood, 1980), communication with peers (Martinez, 1987) and self-regulatory abilities (Neitzel & Stright, 2003). Children whose mothers provide support for autonomy tend to display more adaptive levels of social assertiveness and self-directedness in social and play interactions at preschool (Denham, Renwick, & Holt, 1991) and higher levels of school readiness (e.g., quantitative and literacy skills; Hill, 2001) than children whose mothers display authoritarian or passive parenting patterns.

For example, parent-child interactions that are attentive but nondirective provide children some guidance, but they also allow children the freedom to be expressive, initiating, and self-directed. Social and communication development are enhanced when children are self-directed rather than constantly regulated by adults (Hart & Risley, 1995; MacDonald & Carroll, 1994; Roberts & Barnes, 1992). Interactions that are monitored and responses that are matched to children's developmental abilities and interests can foster continued interest in a current activity, comfortable exploration of its potential dimensions, and mastery motivation.

3. Parental participation in child learning. Parental participation in children's learning, especially language and literacy learning, represents a third aspect of parent engagement. The degree to which a parent explicitly supports and coordinates the nature and frequency of language and literacy-related activities influences or inhibits their child's preschool experiences and school readiness (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006; Wood, 2002). Ample evidence exists for the importance of parents' participation and engagement in their children's educational experiences in the elementary years. When parents are involved, children show improvements in many adaptive outcomes, including prosocial behavior (Comer & Haynes, 1991; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991), self-esteem (Collins, Moles, & Cross, 1982; Sattes, 1985), perseverance and mastery motivation (Estrada, Arsenio, Hess, & Holloway, 1987; Turner & Burke, 2003), and participation in learning activities (Collins et al., 1982; McWayne et al., 2004; Sattes,
1985). Across the elementary and secondary school years, benefits for children and youth include increases in academic achievement (Clark, 1993; Comer, 1988; Epstein, 1991; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Fan & Chen, 2001; Feihman, Keith, & Reimers, 1987; Senechal, 2006; Stevenson & Baker, 1987), fewer placements in special education (Lazar & Darling-ton, 1978; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), higher school attendance rates (Collins et al., 1982), lower dropout rates (Rumberger, 1995), and fewer suspensions (Comer & Haynes, 1991). Additional evidence has demonstrated the importance of parent involvement during the early childhood period (Foster, Lambert, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, & Franze, 2005; Hephburn, 2004; Marcon, 1999; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

The importance of literacy-rich home environments on children's language and academic outcomes is unequivocal (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Espinosa, 2002; Fagan & Iglesias, 1999; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). Well before starting school, children learn valuable information about print and books, sounds and letters and the decontextualized language associated with stories and textbooks that prepares them for later, more formal literacy instruction in school (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). As children interact with parents in routine daily activities (e.g., dialing the phone, reading the mail, writing a grocery list), they learn about critical social, linguistic, cognitive, and motor skills that will serve them well once they start school. The degree to which parents engage their children in these activities (e.g., by providing the opportunity to watch, imitate, practice or ask questions) influences the amount of information children take from these interactions. Furthermore, young children who experience reading and writing as pleasurable events are generally more successful later in school (Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999). Mothers who use comments and open-ended questions during conversations and shared reading activities, rather than predominantly verbal directives and closed questions, usually have children who develop more advanced vocabulary and language skills (Hart & Risley, 1995; Pan, Rowe, Singer, & Snow, 2005).

Additionally, natural learning environments provided and facilitated by parents, such as everyday activities (i.e., mealtimes, interactions with siblings, outdoor or indoor play) in the settings and community locations frequented by young children of a similar age, culture and geographic region (Bruder & Dunst, 2000), have been found to be associated with optimal developmental changes (Dunst, Bruder, Trivette, Hamby, Raab, & McLean, 2001). Primary family relationships that are focal in natural learning environments often include a parent (father, mother, grandparent) and peers (siblings, cousins), as well as friends and playmates that typify most classroom-based interventions and research (Hanft & Pilkington, 2000). Furthermore, the informal support provided to some parents in routine home or community activities (as compared to formal parent training programs, for example) can reportedly produce positive outcomes (social and otherwise) for children and families (Allen & Petr, 1996).

The importance of positive parent-child engagement and interaction during the infant, toddler and preschool years is well-documented for its influence on child outcomes and school readiness. However, consistent with ecologic theory, children interact in and permeate multiple systems and contexts as they develop from infancy to preschool and beyond (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). As a result, relationships between parents and other adults responsible for children's learning and development are important for establishing experiences that are consistent, coherent, and coordinated as children move between home and community (school) settings.

Empirical Evidence for Parent-Professional Engagement and School Readiness

Positive relationships and collaborative partnerships among parents and pro-
fessionals are considered primary protective factors (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1996) or safety nets (Christenson, 2000) for young children. Partnership practices promote an increased focus on and engagement with families, greater provision of services in natural learning settings for children, greater cultural sensitivity, and a community-based system of care and education (Knitzer, Steinberg, & Fleisch, 1993; Mendoza, Katz, Robertson, & Rothenberg, 2003). These are particularly important during the preschool years (Raffaile & Knoff, 1999) when parents are formulating constructs for their role in their children’s education.

Collaboration among key adults within a child’s life is important for the child’s early learning and smooth transitions across systems (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; Eyrs & Jones, 1992; Ramey, 1999). Indeed, collaborative partnerships among parents and professionals correlate with positive social-emotional and behavioral outcomes for children and families, and bolster intervention efficacy and efficiency (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Sin-Chu & Wills, 1996). The goal of collaborative partnerships is “not merely to get families involved, but rather to connect important contexts for strengthening children’s learning and development” (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, p. 7; emphasis added).

Family-centered interventions implemented collaboratively with families to advance children’s skill development and social behaviors “place major emphasis on supporting and strengthening family functioning” (Dunst & Deal, 1994, p. 73). Interventions that focus on promoting family strengths and building constructive partnerships produce changes in the family environment, parent-child relationship, parenting skills, and family involvement in children’s learning (Caspé & Lopez, 2006). For example, research in the area of young children’s mental health has found that the more the family participates in planning services, the better they feel their children’s needs are being met (Koren, Paulson, Kinney, Yatchmonoff, Gordon, & DeChillo, 1997) and the more control they feel in influencing those outcomes (Curtis & Singh, 1996; Thompson, Lobb, Ellis, Herman, Jurkindawicz, & Hel-luza, 1997). Family-centered programs create conditions by which the functioning of all family members is enhanced by focusing on family-identified needs, using existing family strengths, and strengthening social supports for families. Effects are most powerful when interventions establish meaningful connections between family members and professional support personnel to address children’s specific needs of importance to the family unit (Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989).

Contrary to expert-driven family intervention models, family partnership programs are collaborative (structured around mutually determined goals), intentional (focused on specific behaviors and needs), developmentally responsive (appropriate to children’s needs across the developmental spectrum), and strengths-based (aimed at building on family and child competencies rather than remediating professionally-identified deficits). Such programs are focused on creating and sustaining meaningful cross-systemic (family-professional-school) connections, and are predicated on the active engagement of individual professionals and family members co-identifying needs and priorities, developing and implementing interventions, and maintaining collaborative relationships in support of children’s development. This type of partnership-oriented intervention (versus an expert-driven, clinical model) provides greater access to services for children because parent availability provides ongoing, daily opportunity for supported learning. Also, it is believed to increase family acceptance and utility of effective early intervention programs by engaging family members in shared observations, discussion, and brainstorming with professionals that leads to practical strategy selection and intervention designs.

These parent-professional partnerships are based on a proactive approach where-
by professionals support family interactions with their child in everyday routines, rather than "treat" or "serve" their child in an isolated setting (e.g., school, clinic) or activity. The establishment of collaborative relationships with families creates conditions within which family members can become empowered and share in the responsibility for their child's development and school readiness. Through such mechanisms, family-centered service providers strive to promote family competence and confidence in advancing children's learning and development, thereby enabling family members to eventually establish their own goals and independently meet their own needs and those of their children over time (McBride, 1999; Wilson & Dunst, 2004).

**Getting Ready: An Integrated Relational Model to Support School Readiness**

Optimal school readiness for children and their families occurs through the development of positive relationships within the multiple interacting ecological systems of the home (i.e., parent-child relationships) and between the home and other supportive environments (i.e., parent-professional relationships). Parent-child and parent-professional relationships are firmly established empirically as important, unique contexts for healthy child development. However, there currently lacks an integrated model that draws on the theoretical and empirical strengths of relationship-based, ecological interventions in support of school readiness. There exists a need for an integrated early intervention model couched in the multitude of relationships that predict positive child outcomes and school readiness. The Getting Ready model, currently being tested in a large-scale clinical trial, was designed to provide an integrated, ecological approach to school readiness that is research-based, family-centered, and collaborative in nature. It integrates *the triadic intervention* (McCollum & Yates, 1994) and *collaborative (conjoint) consultation models* (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992, 2008; Sheridan et al., 1996) in a unique, ecologically and strengths-based intervention that promotes skills and outcomes in children *and their families* via enhanced relationships (Figure 1). In this model, professionals provide early intervention and education services for parents and children age birth to 5 years that

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**Figure 1. The Getting Ready Model**
focuses on child skills and outcomes by (a) guiding parents to engage in warm and responsive interactions, to support their children’s autonomy, and to participate in children’s learning; and (b) supporting parents and teachers in collaborative interactions to facilitate children’s learning and development. This approach offers opportunities for professionals to support and enhance the quality of parent-child interactions in daily routines and create a shared responsibility between parent and professional to benefit children’s developmental success. The focus on parent-child and parent-professional relationships is believed to enhance not only the child’s developmental readiness for school but the parent’s readiness to act as an advocate and support their child’s learning across ecologic and temporal contexts (i.e., in home, preschool, elementary school, and beyond).

The precursors to the Getting Ready model—triadic and collaborative (conjoint) consultation—are research-based models that individually focus on essential parent-child and parent-teacher relationships, respectively. Triadic consultation is an intervention validated with infants and young children with developmental delays and disabilities (Girolametto, Verbey, & Tannock, 1994; Mahoney & MacDonald, 2007; McCollum, Gooler, Appl, & Yates, 2001). However, despite the research base emanating from these early intervention programs for children with special needs, the basic principles and strategies of triadic intervention apply to interactions with all families, including those that occur in preschools, child care settings, and other programs within which young children and families interact. Its aim is to strengthen parental warmth and sensitivity, and parental competence in supporting autonomy and learning, all within the context of everyday parent-child interactions. The focus is on quality dyadic (parent-child) interactions that reflect a parent’s ability to recognize opportunities for engagement with their young child, maintain the child’s interest and attention, engage in turn-taking, follow the child’s interest, and appropriately challenge and support the child in learning (McCollum & Yates, 1994). The professional becomes an important player in ensuring these dyadic qualities are evident, thus establishing an effective triad (parent-child-professional) for meetings with the parent and child.

The professionals’ efforts in this triadic model (Table 1) are characterized by strategies that go beyond the traditional directives of modeling and suggesting (McCollum & Yates, 1994) and indirectly prompt adjustments in the immediate environment to establish a dyadic context for parent-child interaction, affirm parenting competence, focus parental attention on children’s actions and responses, and provide developmental information to explain observed or absent child behaviors. These professional practices (i.e., strategies), which prioritize positive parent-child interactions and a parent’s role in enhancing their child’s learning and development, allow the parent to experience new levels of competence and confidence in their parenting role.

Collaborative (conjoint) consultation, based on the work of Sheridan and Kratcohill (1992, 2008), describes how adults (parents, professionals, and support staff) can join together to address the social, developmental, or behavioral needs of a young child for whom all parties bear some responsibility. This approach provides a framework for linking systems of home (family) and professional (home-visiting or preschool) agendas to promote mutual goal setting, shared decision-making, and joint attention to a child’s needs.

The collaborative nature of this consultation model encourages parents and professionals to share observations and knowledge of a child, and then mutually identify relevant goals that improve the child’s abilities at home and/or school or child care settings, and positively influence the family and/or professional interactions with the child. With the assistance of a consultant, the parent and teacher/care provider select evidence-based strategies that can be easily implemented across settings. Togeth-
Table 1. Triadic Strategies to Advance Parent-Child Interactions

Establish a dyadic context:
Arrange elements of the environment to increase the probability of developmentally matched, mutually enjoyable interactions between parent and child. Encourage child to engage the parent; direct or move child to face the parent.

Affirm parenting competence:
Warmly recognize developmentally supportive interactions. Comment on the effect of parent actions on child’s competence and interest.

Focus attention:
Comment, question, or expand on aspects of the observed interaction in order to draw the parent’s attention to a particular competency or action in self or the child.

Provide developmental information:
Label, interpret, or explain the developmental significance of the child’s observed emotional, cognitive, linguistic, or motor abilities within the context of play or interaction.

Model:
Assume partner role with child momentarily to demonstrate a strategy or elicit a desired behavior in the child.

Suggest:
Provide short, but specific instruction/direction for how the parent could adjust their interaction at the moment with the child to better achieve desired results.

Source: Based on McCollum & Yates (1994).

er they plan for interactions with the child to achieve mutually determined goals. Suggestions, modeling, and feedback following observed parent and/or teacher application of strategies are practices used by the consultant to facilitate successful implementation or adjustments in the plan across settings. Ongoing data collection of the child’s response to the intervention plan is an integral feature that ensures his or her successful adaptation. The shared responsibility for change, supported implementation of evidence-based intervention strategies, and focused, data-based decision-making are hallmarks of this model (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008). These practices are based on validated behavioral consultation models designed for school-age children that structure the process of identifying needs, assessing environmental inputs, developing and implementing research-based strategies, and evaluating child outcomes through a series of structured problem-solving interviews (Bergan & Kratochwill, 1990; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008; Table 2). The process has been replicated by preschool teachers and other education professionals (e.g., early childhood special educators, school psychologists) in their direct work with families and young children (Brown, 2004; Sheridan, Clarke, Knoche, & Edwards, 2006).

Specific strategies of the Getting Ready model used by the early childhood professional are in Table 3. These strategies are used in a fluid and dynamic way to promote positive child skill development indirectly through the establishment of parent-child and parent-professional relationships. Use of the strategies is intended to (a) build a parent’s competence and confidence in establishing warm and sensitive interactions with their child, promoting their child’s emerging autonomy, and participating actively in their child’s learning; (b) promote parent-professional partnerships; and ultimately (c) promote the child’s healthy social-emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development. The strategies that characterize the Getting Ready model are described in the following sections.
Table 2. Behavioral and Relational Goals of Collaborative (Conjoint) Consultation by Stage

**Needs (Problem) Identification**

**Behavioral Goals:**
- Identify strengths of the child, family, teacher, systems
- Behaviorally define the concern or problem as it is represented across home and school settings
- Explore environmental conditions that may be inhibiting desired behaviors or motivating problem behaviors
- Determine a shared goal for consultation
- Establish a procedure for the collection of baseline data across settings

**Relationship Goals:**
- Identify strengths of the child, family, and school
- 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
- Increase communication and knowledge regarding the child, goals, concerns, and culture of family and school

**Needs (Problem) Analysis**

**Behavioral Goals:**
- Review baseline data
- Examine and discuss trends across settings/conditions
- Collaboratively design intervention plan sensitive to setting variables
- Ensure parent and teacher understanding of intervention plan implementation through demonstration, role-play, practice, and feedback
- Reaffirm data collection procedures

**Relationship Goals:**
- 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**

**Behavioral Goals:**
- Monitor implementation of intervention plan across settings
- Provide feedback, retraining as necessary
- Discuss need for adjustments in plan
- Continue data collection procedures

**Relationship Goals:**
- Highlight consistency in plan strategy implementation across settings
- Note efforts of parents and teachers with each other
- Reinforce involvement and collaborative efforts at addressing concerns
- Facilitate communication around implementation efforts

(continues)
Table 2. (continued)

Plan Evaluation

Behavioral Goals:
- Review data; adjust or continue implementation
- Decide if shared goal has been achieved
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention across all settings
- Discuss strategies for maintaining gains
- Schedule additional meetings if necessary
- Establish means for caregivers and teachers to continue to partner in the future

Relationship Goals:
- 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

Source: Based on Sheridan & Kratochwill (2008).

Table 3. Getting Ready Model Intervention Strategies

Establish parent-child and parent-professional relationship
- Establish a context for parent-child interaction
- Listen, respond to parent priorities, concerns, challenges

Share observations/knowledge of child over time
- Share/seek information about child's progress
- Affirm parents' insights and competent observations

Identify mutually agreed upon developmental expectations for child
- Focus parents' attention on child strengths and developmental needs
- Share developmentally appropriate information

Share ideas and brainstorm methods for helping child meet expectations
- Mutually identify natural learning opportunities in the home
- Identify current and potential parent behaviors that can support targeted learning
- Make suggestions when necessary

Observe parent-child interactions and provide feedback
- Observe parent and child in meaningful context
- Identify current strengths related to developmental expectations
- Provide developmental information
- Model/suggest on-the-spot when necessary to support parent interactions with their child

Monitor the child's skill development and determine directions for continued growth
- Engage parent in noting child's progress and measuring progression towards individualized developmental expectations
- Discuss needed adjustments in interactions and/or learning opportunities
- Cycle to new developmental expectations and learning opportunities as needed
Establish Parent-Child and Parent-Professional Relationship

Relationships lay the foundation for this model. From the earliest exchanges infants, toddlers or preschool-age children have with their caregivers, to the relationships parents and early childhood professionals have with one another over time, intentional efforts to establish meaningful connections are essential.

Professionals can encourage intentional and positive interactions between a parent and child during home visits, conferences, or informal meetings at school/child care. This can be accomplished by positioning the parent and child in close, and if possible, face-to-face proximity with one another; positioning themselves farther away from the child and parent; encouraging the parent to demonstrate a recent parent-child activity or exchange; prompting the child to show or tell the parent a recent developmental accomplishment completed in the classroom; or encouraging the child to ask the parent for help or to answer his or her question. Highlighting a child’s strengths in front of a parent or encouraging a child to seek a parent’s input or answers to questions can foster parents’ levels of competence and confidence.

Positive, collaborative relationships between the parent and professional are exhibited in several ways in the Getting Ready model. Listening actively and sincerely to a parent’s challenges and concerns shows a professional’s interest and dedication to their work with the parent and child. Use of open-ended questions by the professional allows parents an opportunity to describe their own observations and views and promotes mutual information sharing. The professional can promote a partnership orientation by asking parents to share strategies they have found effective to address a concern; requesting the parents’ opinions about the merit of a new idea or focus for the child’s development; or soliciting parents’ ideas for dealing with new challenges and pairing them with appropriate developmental information. These behaviors establish the professional’s desire to partner with the parent as opposed to exercising an expert role (Sheridan & Kratchwill, 2008; Sheridan, Warnes, Cowan, Schmidt, & Clarke, 2004).

Share Observations/Knowledge of Child over Time

Parents and professionals each can have unique, relevant experiences with children, and hold perspectives based on their own interactions, observations, and interpretations. Focused intervention in the Getting Ready model benefits from parents and professionals exchanging information about what they observe, experience, and otherwise notice about a child’s progress, including his or her behavioral or affective approach or response to situations.

In interactions with parents, professionals can comment on an infant’s or preschooler’s behavioral cues (e.g., smiles, signs of discomfort or distress, expression of feelings) to guide the parent’s attention and affirm the positive effect of a parent’s contingent response and positive affect with their child. The professional can ask relevant questions to focus the parent’s attention on a child’s strengths and needs, seek parental perspectives on day-to-day child interests and activities, and clarify developmentally relevant observations. Professional observations can be shared with parents with reference to their child’s developmental milestones and emerging abilities as well as the parent’s desired expectations for the child. As parents demonstrate knowledge of their child’s strengths and abilities, professionals have the opportunity to affirm and acknowledge the parental perspective, thereby contributing to parental competence and confidence.

Identify Mutually Agreed Upon Developmental Expectations for Child

By nature of their respective relationships with children, parents and profession-
als offer unique vantage points about appropriate expectations and aspirations for development, including cultural beliefs and values. Open discussions of beliefs and desires about a child’s developmental progression, including its course and timing, leads to the establishment of an agreed upon set of desired developmental targets toward which the child can progress, as well as strategies for how the parent, and if the child is enrolled in a group program, the teacher can encourage and support these behaviors.

Professionals can assist a parent in identifying appropriate developmental targets by focusing the parent’s attention on their child’s current interests, challenges, emerging abilities, and strengths in everyday routines such as eating, dressing, bathing, and playing. Discussions of parental observations during daily activities (e.g., shared book reading, TV/DVD viewing, car travel, shopping, walks to the park, and visits with relatives) and their developmental relevance, along with the professional’s own observations of the child, focuses the parent-professional meetings and sets the stage for future parent-child interactions and play-based learning opportunities.

Share ideas and brainstorm methods for helping child meet expectations. One strength of a collaborative approach lies in the opportunity it provides for parents and teachers to share ideas for routine experiences and planned activities that can support children’s continual progression toward healthy development. In the Getting Ready model, parents and professionals together determine means by which opportunities can be provided that match children’s interest and allow children to explore cognitive and social tasks in everyday situations, thereby positively affecting development and adjustment across the various home learning contexts and across home-school contexts when enrolled in center/school programs. Specifically, parents and professionals can discuss the contexts that best elicit and support a child’s growth and share responsibility for monitoring changes in the child’s learning and development. Parents and professionals can work together to scaffold the child’s learning by first identifying routine opportunities for the child to participate in meaningful tasks and household routines ("guided participation"; Rogoff, 1990) in ways tailored to the style and priorities of each family’s situation and cultural context, and the goals identified for the child. The parent’s construction of his or her role as guide, support and mentor for their child is important to promote their sense of efficacy, and can be facilitated by the professional.

In the Getting Ready model, parents are assisted in identifying, and affirmed for recognizing, everyday learning opportunities for their children that advance cognition, language, literacy, and other early learning skills, as well as children’s social-emotional capacities. By seeing their home as a learning environment, parents increase their ease in providing time, materials, and space for exploratory play and problem-solving, cultural exploration, vocabulary growth, and print interaction. Professionals might suggest developmentally appropriate play-based activities or routine daily events and model adult behaviors (i.e., commenting, elaborating, modeling, questioning) that can maintain a child’s interest and support his or her learning. Finally, the parent’s role in supporting their child’s learning is advanced through discussions with professionals about the value of various developmentally appropriate educational activities, such as drawing, coloring, construction, and pretend play, and how these learning activities can be routinely and comfortably provided and supported in home settings and noninstructional interactions with siblings, parents, and other family members.

Observe Parent-Child Interactions and Provide Feedback

A goal of collaboration between parents and professionals is enhancing parents’ competence and confidence in their abilities to interact with their child in a supportive manner that enhances children’s learn-
ing. Parents' effective use of strategies that promote the attainment of new developmental achievements for their child may be augmented in the Getting Ready model through the dynamic process of observation of parent-child interactions, shared reflections, professional guidance, and ongoing refinement of strategy use.

Beyond discussing and describing quality learning opportunities for children, professionals provide parents an opportunity to practice in the context of triadic (parent-child-professional) interactions. Professionals have a number of opportunities to establish and observe the parent-child interaction, and can adjust the manner in which parents support learning with their children directly and indirectly, as well as offer parental validations and affirmations. Triadic interactions with parents, professionals, and children (e.g., during home visits, after-school meetings, family events at school or child care, or parent-teacher conferences with the child present) should focus the professional's attention on the parent as learner and the parent's attention on their child as learner while prompting the parent's reflection on the effects of their own actions. Shared play activities or routine care (i.e., dressing, feeding, bathing) can be the medium for affirming a parent's accurate reading of their child's indirect requests or invitation to play or engage in a shared task. Parents may benefit from on-the-spot suggestions for engaging a passive child, redirecting a distracted or impulsive child, guiding a discouraged child through a challenging new activity or reinforcing positive behaviors demonstrated by their child.

Other behaviors that professionals aim to reinforce or, as needed, suggest or model for the parent include turn-taking with children, waiting and responding with exaggerated pleasure/affect, or asking open-ended questions to promote dialogue and extended conversations. Simple social games (i.e., peek-a-boo, I spy), and songs or rhymes indicative of a family's culture may be acknowledged, demonstrated, or suggested by the professional to provide the parent with awareness of the value and effect of these simple interactions with children throughout infancy, toddlerhood, and the preschool years. Finally, these spontaneous or purposeful opportunities to observe parent-child interactions allow the professional to guide and support a parent in following their child's lead/interests, watching and listening to the child, communicating in a sincere give-and-take manner, making comments, giving choices, and viewing the present moment from the child's vantage point. Likewise, setting appropriate limits, establishing routines, praising and reinforcing appropriate behavior, and redirecting a child's misbehavior are aspects of parenting that promote a child's autonomy and social skills but may require guidance from a professional when a parent struggles to consistently use these practices. Observations of the parent-child interaction allow the professional to comment and support the parent in a relevant, meaningful context. Developmental information provided during these triadic interactions often has meaning for the parent as they see the value of their own actions on the child's abilities, interests and emerging skills.

**Monitor the Child's Skill Development and Determine Directions for Continued Growth**

The intentional, focused approach promoted in the Getting Ready model necessitates continual monitoring and re-establishment of priorities and developmental expectations for the child and family in a recursive manner. As children respond to the efforts of parents and professionals, attain new skills, and demonstrate potential for continued growth within or across developmental domains, new priorities will emerge. Just as parents and professionals together can determine means by which opportunities can be provided that match children's interest and abilities and allow children to explore new cognitive, social, and linguistic tasks in
everyday situations, so too can professionals and parents share responsibility for judging the adequacy of those choices. Explicit discussions about a child's response to new learning opportunities in home or school, or new parenting behaviors, will provide both parent and professional opportunities to reflect on elements of those efforts that show evidence of efficacy or need for modification. In addition, sensitivity to children's new interests and abilities will also cause a shift in directions for continued growth. The cyclical, dynamic problem-solving process encourages the ongoing support for children's development across time and context. Data on children's progress collected over time, evident through direct observations, products, or artifacts, help guide systematic decision making in the Getting Ready model. Mutual problem-solving fosters parental skill in making objective decisions related to their child, and also models a process that parents can use in the future when making decisions and communicating with teachers about methods for supporting their child's development and school performance.

Summary

The Getting Ready model provides a unique context for building children's competencies. In this model, learning opportunities that are implemented by parents and professionals in familiar settings frequented by the child promote the child's development across contexts. Additionally, structured, data-based collaboration is critical to the Getting Ready model; when parents and professionals determine goals mutually and monitor children's growth collectively, parental competencies and ongoing involvement are enhanced (Sheridan, Knoche, & Marvin, 2008). In turn, the children's opportunities for frequent, supported learning in everyday activities and interactions are advanced, resulting in targeted learning and optimal development of readiness skills and behaviors. This model promotes continuity across home and early education settings, and the use of evidence-based strategies known to promote children's growth in the natural contexts within which they function. Decisions for the type and focus of services are based on mutual understanding of children's developmental needs and responses, and parents' strengths and perspectives and contribute to optimal development and school readiness for children and families.

The focus on parent-child interactions as the medium for children's learning prior to school entrance allows the parent and child to develop a relationship that is built on trust and support, likely to endure across the school years. Parents, in collaboration or partnership with professionals, are encouraged to engage with their child to establish what is and what is not possible at a given age. Parents become observers of their children, thereby enhancing their expertise on their child's preferences and abilities in everyday activities. Parents also become skilled in describing these observations to professionals and comfortably engaging in brainstorming and decision making about optimal strategies to advance the child's learning or change his or her behavior at home and/or school. Getting ready for school in this model occurs within an ecology of relationships and learning opportunities for children and parents in which both are supported and guided toward competence and confidence that will carry them successfully throughout children's formal education.

Parent-child and parent-professional relationships provide the foundation for advancing children's developmental abilities and parents' roles as child advocate and mentor in the Getting Ready model. With these skills and roles established prior to the start of formal schooling, parents and children can enter the educational system prepared for learning and with the tools to establish relationships with new adults and peers, thereby contributing to ongoing academic and personal success. As typical challenges arise
in a child's early years in school, parents are prepared to engage in problem-solving with the child and other professionals and identify goals, plans, and strategies that will result in possible resolution of concerns.

Getting children "ready" for school is a multicomponent, relationship-based endeavor. The Getting Ready model emphasizes input (environments and resources that provide enriching learning opportunities) and processes (interactions and mechanisms that promote children's acquisition of skills) and transactions among these systems to create contexts for children's developmental outcomes and skills (the products of learning opportunities and supports). Focusing on competence and confidence in all participants, including parents, children, and teachers, facilitates a systemic approach to school readiness. Teachers develop competence and confidence in their interactions with children and parents. Parents develop competence and confidence in their abilities to interact with their children in growth-enhancing ways. Ultimately, children become competent and confident learners and successful in social and academic endeavors in their formal school years and beyond.

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