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# Families and Schools in Partnership: Linking Theory, Science and Practice to Promote Children's Development

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# Families and Schools in Partnership: Linking Theory, Science and Practice to Promote Children's Development

Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.

Invited Address presented on behalf of  
Division 16 of the American Psychological Association

August 24, 2001

San Francisco, CA

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## Why Families & Schools in Partnership?

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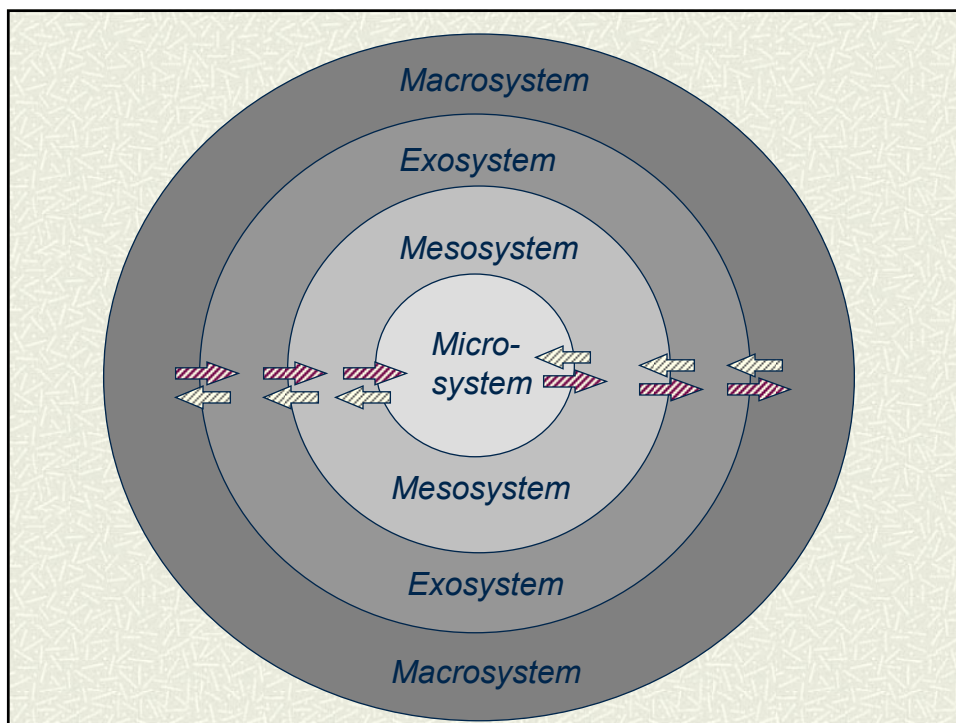
“It is now well-accepted that the home plays an important role in children’s learning and achievement... children learn values, attitudes, skills, and behaviors in the home that prepare them well for the tasks of school” (Sloane, 1991, p. 161).

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# Theory: Ecological Perspectives

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.
- Difficulties occur when there is a mismatch across one or more subsystems.
- Partnership programs and services are focused on forging a more effective match between the needs of an individual student, and strengths of the interfacing home & school systems.
- Main attention is always on the potential benefits and



## Defining Characteristics of Family-School Partnerships

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Interactions among partners are collaborative:

- A diversity of individuals and vantage points work together as co-equal parties, share in the identification of goals and solution of problems, and forge trusting relationships.
- Resources, power, and responsibilities are shared.
- More than simply working together, the notion of partnerships involves a fundamental restructuring of how individuals across home and school systems work together.

## Defining Characteristics of Family-School Partnerships

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Relationships across home and school systems are cooperative, interdependent, and balanced:

- Goals are mutually determined.
- Outcomes achieved in the context of the partnership are uniquely superior to those achieved by any one party in isolation.
- Roles are complementary -- Each partner makes a unique contribution that is mutually beneficial.
- All have generally equal opportunity in decision-making.

## Defining Characteristics of Family-School Partnerships

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Maintenance of a positive relationship is a priority:

- Failure to develop relationships can undermine the formation of successful partnerships.
- Personal needs are put aside to allow the needs and goals of the partnership to take precedence.
- To be successful, partners must believe that the other person is trustworthy, is working toward a mutually held goal, and holds positive regard toward each other.
- All believe that the partnership and the anticipated outcomes are worthy of the expenditure of time and energy necessary for its maintenance.

## Defining Characteristics of Family-School Partnerships

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Services are flexible, responsive, and proactive:

- Unique family-school contexts define the form the partnership takes.

Differences in perspectives are seen as strengths:

- A range of diverse experiences, skills, and views are brought to bear on the solution of problems.
- Unique knowledge, resources, talents, and expertise brought by parents and educators enhance the potential outcomes for students.

## Defining Characteristics of Family-School Partnerships

There is a commitment to cultural competence:

- Cultural values and traditions of the family and school are respected.
- Services that are sensitive to important cultures and traditions of schools and families are most likely to be effective.

Emphasis is on outcomes and goal attainment:

- Partnerships have clearly specified goals, and progress is monitored through data-based decision making processes.
- Programs are not offered because they are available:

## Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

*From Theory to Research to Practice*

## CBC: A Definition

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- 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.

## CBC: A Definition

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- All stages of consultation are conducted in a simultaneous (rather than parallel) manner.
- Four problem solving stages procedurally define the model:
  - Conjoint Problem Identification, Problem Analysis, Treatment (Plan) Implementation, Treatment (Plan) Evaluation

## 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 (*Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Elliott, 1990; Galloway & Sheridan, 1993; Sheridan & Colton, 1994; Colton & Sheridan, 1998; Weiner, Sheridan, & Jenson, 1999; see Sheridan, 1997 or Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996 for a review and case studies*)

## Outcome Research in CBC

***Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson (in press):***

Objectives were to:

- ❖ Assist parents and teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities (or students at risk) who are 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



## 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 case outcomes
- 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

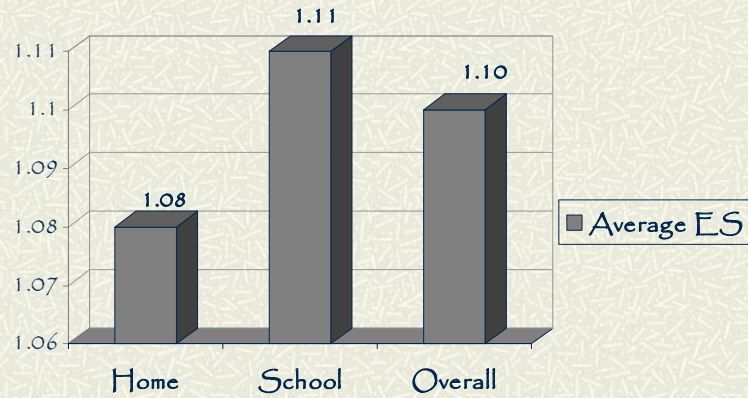
### ■ Social Validity

- **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)  
Consultation satisfaction assessed with the Consultant Effectiveness Form (CEF)

## Results

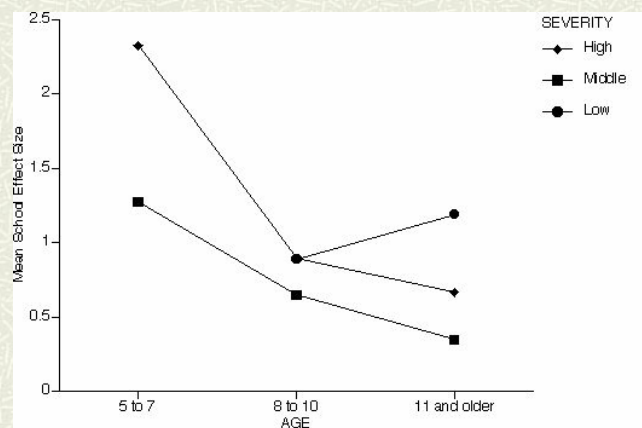
- ❖ Magnitude of ESs range = 1.08 – 1.11 (M = 1.10; SD = 1.07; CI = .83-1.36)
- ❖ At school, a regression model fitting client age and symptom severity predicted ES relatively well ( $R^2=0.425$ ; Adjusted  $R^2=0.343$ ;  $p=.008$ )
  - Older client with less severe symptoms or younger client with more severe symptoms predicted to experience 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

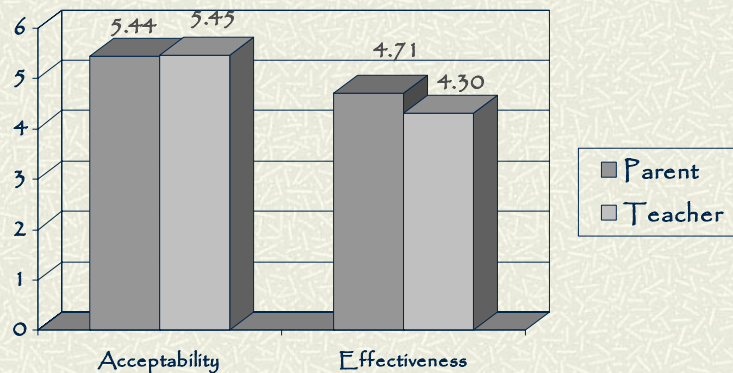
## Regression Analysis



# Results

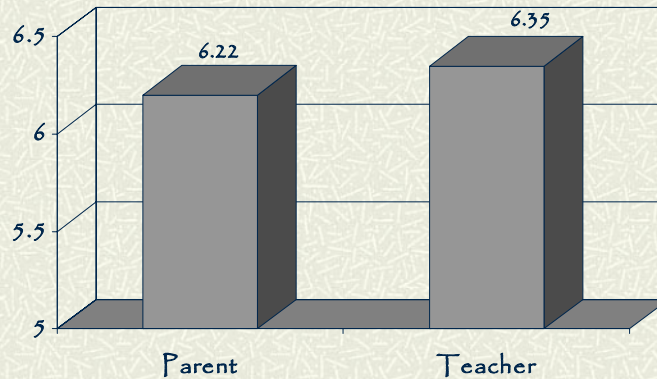
- ❖ Social validity assessments indicated that:
  - Consultee perceptions of the outcome of CBC, as assessed on BIRS Effectiveness factor, were favorable
    - Parents' mean item rating = 4.71 of 6.0; SD = .95
    - Teachers' mean item rating = 4.30; SD = 1.3
  - 100% of parents and 94% of teachers reported that goals were partially or fully met on Goal Attainment Scaling
  - Consultee perceptions of the acceptability of CBC, as assessed on the BIRS Acceptability factor, were very positive
    - Parents' mean item rating = 5.44 of 6.0; SD = .52
    - Teachers' mean item rating = 5.45; SD = .60

## 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 to Practice: Problem Solving 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

## Research to Practice: Problem Solving Goals of CBC

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## Research to Practice: Problem Solving Goals of CBC

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## 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

## Process Research in CBC

- # Relational communication researchers have begun to investigate the verbal processes inherent in CBC
- # Three major themes are emphasized in this research:
  - Process rather than content of communication tends to be considered
  - Messages are viewed in transactions rather than in isolation
  - The nature of the change in messages is examined over time
- # Constructs of domineeringness and dominance have been investigated
- # Hypotheses tend to suggest that consultant control of the process would be related to positive

## Process Research in CBC

- # In a descriptive study of CBC process, Erchul et al. (1999) found :
  - The absolute levels of domineeringness and dominance were similar across consultants and consultees
  - No one individual attempted to direct or influence the relationship at disproportionate levels
  - The exchanges were characterized as collaborative in that there were generally low levels of domineeringness (range = .24 to .33) and dominance across participants (range = .35 to .41); and all participants shared generally equally in their overall influence.

## Process Research in CBC

- # In a follow up study, Grissom et al. (2001) corroborated these findings and found:
  - Approximately equal levels of dominance among consultants and consultees (average proportions range from .39 to .50);
  - Negative correlations between parent dominance and (a) teacher satisfaction; and (b) parent ratings of client goal attainment.
- # Teachers may not be familiar with sharing a directive role, or may be uncomfortable taking a relatively less directive role with parents.
- # Many parents' role constructs do not include high levels of power or control vis-a-vis their child's educational goals (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Relative to interactions wherein power exchanges are co-equal, those in which parental dominance/control exist may contribute to role confusion as related to educational goal attainment.



## Process Research in CBC

- Preliminary findings of Sheridan et al. (under revision) suggest that a high degree of collaboration is present in CBC
  - Individual speech acts are highly collaborative
  - Reciprocal exchanges among participants are highly cooperative
  - Domineering interactions tend to be negatively correlated with direct behavioral outcomes, teachers' ratings of efficacy, teachers' acceptability of CBC, and teachers' satisfaction
  - Cooperative interactions tend to be positively related to parent and teacher satisfaction.
- Data are still being analyzed so caution must be exercised when considering these patterns

## Research to Practice: Process Goals & Strategies in CBC

- Improve communication and knowledge about child, family, and school
- Increase commitments to shared goals
- Address problems across, rather than only within, settings
- Promote shared ownership for problem identification and solution
- Promote greater conceptualization of a problem
- Increase the diversity of expertise and resources available
- Establish and strengthen parent-professional partnerships

## Research to Practice: Process Goals & Strategies in CBC

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## Research to Practice: Process Goals & Strategies in CBC

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## 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 collaborative
  - Although still being investigated, 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
- # Ongoing research is being conducted investigating the effect of CBC on relationships and attitudes among parents and teachers.
- # More research is needed to understand specific roles and relationship variables in

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