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Assessment of Young Children with Special Needs: Portfolio vs. Standardized Tests

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BEST PRACTICES FOR FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

by

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INTRODUCTION

Today's children have two institutions that are primarily responsible for their education: their families and the schools. Both want to help children learn, grow, and develop into caring, responsible and educated adults (Henderson, 1987). When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

The family provides the first educational environment where a great deal of learning occurs before their children begin school. For example, by age 3, children have acquired more than half the language they will use throughout their lives (White, 1987). This rapid learning underscores how critically important it is for families to be actively involved in their children's learning and development (Junge, 1995).

At a time when early childhood educators are encouraged to involve all families, the percentage of families who are challenging to engage in their children's education is increasing. Over the years, a tremendous change in family life has taken place. The family structures and cultural backgrounds of children have become more diverse and complex. The traditional nuclear family, where two parents are married to each other and living together, is no longer the dominant model (Henderson & Berla, 1994). The dramatic social

and economic changes that have swept the country leave many educators struggling to assist and engage families in being actively involved with their children (Junge, 1995).

The question this paper will answer is: Are there best practices that should be used in early childhood education that promote active participation of families in their children's education? The challenge for educators is to move beyond the more traditional family involvement activities such as attending open house and routine parent-teacher conferences. Dooley-Burns (1995) viewed these practices as one-way communication from school to home rather than a partnership where each partner is truly respected as having something valuable to contribute. McAllister-Swap (1993) defined her Partnership Model where parents and educators work together to accomplish the common mission of helping all children to experience success. It emphasized two-way communication, parents' strengths, joint problem-solving, and school-wide involvement.

Definitions

Best practices for children. Practices that are developmentally appropriate and should be available to all children and their families. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes that a high quality early childhood program provides a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding appropriately to the needs of families (Bredekamp, 1991).

Collaboration. Foster (1985) described collaboration as a way of working together to achieve a common goal. For partnerships to work, there

must be mutual trust and respect, an ongoing exchange of information, agreement on goals and strategies, and a sharing of rights and responsibilities (U. S. Department of Education, 1994).

Empowerment. Deal, Dunst, and Trivette (1989) referred to empowerment as a means of creating opportunities for family members to become more competent and self-sustaining with respect to their abilities to mobilize their social networks to get needs met and attain goals. It can enable parents to assist in providing their children with an appropriate education.

Family involvement. In a child's education, it refers to the active participation by any adult who plays a significant role in that child's life (Dooley-Burns, 1995). This can include the biological parents, grandparents, extended family members, neighbors, or any significant adult in a child's life.

Parent involvement. A parent's participation in home and school activities such as raising funds, helping in the classroom or on field trips, or being involved with their children in learning activities at home (Henderson, 1987). Usually this includes the biological parents. The terms family involvement and parent involvement are used interchangeably in the literature.

Purpose

Teachers of young children have a major leadership role not only in guiding children's development and learning, but also in designing and implementing programs that promote a partnership between family and school experiences (Swick, 1991). The purpose of this paper is to look more closely at the research and theoretical literature that has identified attributes, roles, and practices that parents and teachers use to build successful

partnerships. It will focus on best practices used in effective early childhood programs that initiate partnerships and promote families to be actively involved in their children's education. In addition, ways of empowering families and strengthening the family/school relationship in the early childhood years will be investigated.

Several barriers have traditionally blocked child and family empowerment during the early childhood years. The barriers confronting many families and perspectives on how these barriers can be resolved through the use of best practices will also be examined.

Special attention will be given to families of children with special needs. In earlier times, parents were advised to institutionalize a child who had a disability. Since 1975, there has been a positive change in the field of special education. A number of laws that directly affect young children and their families have been passed to provide services for and treatment of individuals with developmental disabilities. No child or youth can be denied an education because he or she has a disability, and all students with disabilities must have available to them placements and services to meet their unique needs (Hehir, 1994).

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Today's schools face a new set of expectations. They are expected to prepare all children for living in a complex and ever-changing society. In doing so, they are expected to be "in partnership" with families and communities in meeting multiple social and educational needs (Swick, 1991).

On March 31, 1994, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act was signed into law. Goals 2000 supports the development of voluntary state standards for student learning, providing incentives for local changes in curriculum and instruction, and encourages community involvement in education (Galinsky, Goldsmith, & Hardman, 1995). Among the eight education improvement goals, one stands out for its inclusiveness. The United States Department of Education (1994a) stated, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and academic growth of children" (p. II).

Changing national priorities is a positive step toward educational improvement. Any successful school improvement effort should have family involvement as a special focus (U. S. Department of Education, 1994). Strong families have been a principal source of this country's success in the past, and they will play an essential part in improving the quality of our schools

and our communities, thus ensuring that what our children learn will carry them to a successful future (U. S. Department of Education, 1994).

Three decades of research have shown that family participation improves students' learning. This is true whether the family is rich or poor, and whether the parents finished high school (deKanter, Ginsburg, & Milne, 1986; Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Keith & Keith, 1993; Liontos, 1992; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Ziegler (1987) stated, "Parent encouragement at home and participation in school activities are the key factors related to children's achievement, more significant than either student ability or socioeconomic status" (p. 151). Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, and Bloom (1993) summarized it this way:

> The socioeconomic level or cultural background of a home need not determine how well a child does at school. Parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds, different levels of education, income, or occupational status can and do provide stimulating environments that support and encourage the learning of their children. It is what parents do in the home rather than their status that is important. (p. 145)

Examining how the effects of family involvement influence the child, Becher (1994) found there are several key family process variables, or ways of behaving, that are clearly related to student achievement. Children with high achievement scores have parents who have high expectations for them. Families should set goals and standards that are appropriate for their children's age and maturity and recognize and encourage special talents (Bloom, 1985; Kellaghan et al., 1993). Clark (1990) found that families who praise their children's skills and efforts, show interest and concern, and reward success tend to have children who are successful in school. These families tend to see themselves as "teachers" of their children (Becher, 1994).

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS THAT PROMOTE PARTNERSHIPS

Families, like all living systems, must interact with other systems to grow in positive ways. It is through social networks, relationships with formal support services, and partnerships with caregivers, teachers, pastors, and other helpers that families acquire the resources and support essential to their continuing growth (Swick, 1991). Developing effective family-environment relationships is an ongoing process that requires skills and attitudes that promote reciprocal and responsive interactions (Swick, 1991).

To develop an environment in which positive living can flourish, healthy families utilize a relationship-building process. Swick (1991) identified 10 characteristics for families who seem to function in healthy modes: love, religiosity, respect, communication, individuality, togetherness, consideration, commitment, parental competence, and sharing. Each characteristic is related to the relationship-building process. Love is the strong emotional bond present, beginning with parental attachment to infants. Religiosity refers to the strong sense of faith which is characterized by the accepting, valuing, and nurturing of each family member. Respect is the mutual concern for each other and the support of each person's well-being. Communication refers to the active responsive/listening behaviors of all family members. Individuality is where each person in the family is seen as unique and is encouraged to differentiate his or her own interests and talents. Togetherness refers to the sense of working together as a team and sharing roles to meet the needs of the family. Consideration is the sensitive actions and responding with compassion to the problems of each family member.

Commitment is the long-term support present in the family. Sharing resources, responsibilities, ideas, and feelings is a necessity in relationship building. Parental competence refers to the leadership and nurturance that parents provide to guide and support the family in dealing with developmental and environmental changes.

These characteristics are developmental in nature, with the foundation taking shape during the early childhood years. The relationship-building skills and characteristics described provide families with the tools and the meaning essential for having positive and growing partnerships with schools and other social systems (Swick, 1991).

Developing Literacy

Reading together is the single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading (Anderson, Heibert, & Wilkinson, 1985). If every parent of a child ages 1 through 9 spent 1 hour reading or working on school work with their child 5 days a week, American parents would annually devote at least 8.7 billion hours to supporting their children's reading. In money terms, if the child's teacher spent the same one-on-one time, the cost to the American taxpayer would be around $230 billion, about the same as what the American public pays yearly for the entire American K-12 public education enterprise (U. S. Department of Education, 1994). Families also can tell stories, share problems, and write letters, lists, and messages with their children to further encourage literacy skills.

Family Routines

Studies show that successful students have parents who create and maintain family routines (Clark, 1990). Routines include providing time and a quiet place to study or read, assigning responsibility for household chores, having set times to get up and go to bed, and eating dinner together (Benson, Buckley, & Medrich, 1980; Clark, 1990; Kellaghan et al., 1993; Walberg, 1984).

Families can limit the amount of television viewing, select quality programs, watch programs together, and discuss them (U. S. Department of Education, 1994). Studies show that academic achievement drops sharply for children who watch television more than 10 hours a week, or an average of 2 hours a day (U. S. Department of Education, 1987). There is inconclusive evidence that the type of programs children watch can influence their behavior.

Community Services

The United States Department of Education (1994) recommended that community services need to be readily available to families. These can include health care services, housing assistance, adult education and family literacy, employment counseling, appropriate and nurturing day care facilities, as well as preschool programs. Families need to know that when they have difficulty doing what is needed, schools, organizations in the community, and religious institutions can provide assistance and draw families into partnerships to meet some of their basic needs (U. S. Department of Education, 1994).

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS THAT PROMOTE PARTNERSHIPS

Throughout history, teachers have been encouraged to view their role as partners with parents. Most early childhood teacher education programs include coursework and practical experience on parent involvement.

Swick (1991) cited the following four personal characteristics of teachers that enhance their involvement with parents during the early childhood years: sensitivity, accessibility, flexibility, and reliability. Sensitive teachers take a positive interest in the family dynamics, giving consideration to them in a compassionate way. An extension of this characteristic is teachers' openness or accessibility to parents' ideas on their children's development and learning. Sigel (1985) cited openness as a personality characteristic that has been correlated with teacher support of children and parents. Even if a teacher is unable to carry out a parent request, listening to parent ideas increases the value of their relationship. A characteristic that increases the trust level between teachers and parents is flexibility or the willingness to adapt to child and parent needs. Consistent and reliable performance by teachers on family-school issues such as communication, positive discipline, child well-being, family involvement and effective teaching have been behaviors that parents indicate as important.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes that early childhood teachers must work in partnerships with families and communicate regularly with children's parents (Bredekamp, 1991). Teachers are responsible for establishing and maintaining frequent contacts with parents (Brazelton, 1984; Honig, 1982; Katz, 1980). Teachers need to share child development knowledge, insights and resource with

parents (Brazelton, 1984). Teachers, parents, agencies, programs, and consultants who have educational responsibility for the child at different times should share developmental information about children as they pass from one program or level to another (Meisels, 1985; Read, Gardner, & Mahler, 1986; Ziegler, 1985).

Based on what is known regarding teacher characteristics that promote parent involvement, especially during the early childhood years, teachers who promote strong parent/teacher partnerships strongly believe in the vital role of parents in their children's education. Teachers who are in the process of continuing personal growth are more receptive to parent involvement (Swick & McKnight, 1993). They also have engaged in specialized training related to having effective partnership and are members of professional associations. They have the support of school leaders and are child- and family-oriented in their philosophy and teaching style (Epstein, 1991; Galinsky, 1988; Powell, 1990; Swick, 1991).

BARRIERS TO ACTIVE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

With the rise in "two-breadwinner families," one-parent families and the need for family members to hold more than one job, families have many demands on their time (U. S. Department of Education, 1994). Sixty-six percent of employed parents with children under the age of 18 indicated they do not have enough time for their children (Families and Work Institute, 1995). In addition to the time factor, Henderson (1988) continued to say that lack of transportation, distance from home, neighborhood, children to care for, and employers' inflexible leave policies also contribute to the principle barriers of

effective communication and collaboration. The research also places considerable emphasis on the attitudes and expectations of teachers and principals particularly their labeling or blaming certain kinds of families. Educators frequently mention their need for more information on how to work with families and their lack of adequate professional training in this area (Henderson, 1988).

Many parents today are unsure how to help their children learn (National Commission on Children, 1991). Some parents have had negative experiences with school themselves and are reluctant to return to school even as a parent. They may feel intimidated and unsure about the value of their contributions compared with those of a teacher. Yet, many parents say they would be willing to spend more time on homework or other learning activities with children if teachers gave them more guidance (Epstein, 1991; Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). Stipek, Roseblatt, and DiRocco (1994) found that by sharing developmentally appropriate materials and instructions with developmentally appropriate materials and instructions with parents, teachers can help them see the benefits of embedding learning in everyday activities. Stipek, et al. (1994) found that the more information teachers provided on gains the children made from activities, the more parents appreciated the activities.

Cultural Barriers

The families of the children in America's schools are more and more diverse. Many families do not speak or understand English. In the 1980s, the number of poor Hispanic and Asian immigrant children increased dramatically (Morra, 1994). Even those family members who speak English,

but have little education, often have difficulty in communicating with schools because their life experiences and perspectives are so different (Comer, 1988)

Wong-Fillmore's (1990) research was based on the cultural backgrounds of five different racial and ethnic groups. Wong-Fillmore concluded that the more securely children are anchored in their primary culture, the better their chances to adjust successfully to new environments. He felt the problem lies not in a lack of preparation for learning, but in the mismatch between the preparation provided by the home and that which is expected by the school. Programs need to build on children's home experiences while providing some of the experiences needed for school. Comer (1988) pointed out that when parents and schools collaborate to help children adjust to the world of school, bridging the gap between the culture at home and mainstream American schools, children of all backgrounds tend to do well. If children know that their parents and teachers understand and respect each other, share similar expectations and stay in touch, children feel comfortable with who they are and can reconcile their experiences at home and school.

Social and Economic Barriers

Parenting is difficult and stressful living in a society that does not appear to value the work of raising children. Parents often do not feel valued by society for their role as parents.

Research on families during the early childhood years indicated there are eight key risk areas that threaten the integrity of children and families (Garbarino, 1982; Thompson & Hupp, 1992). The risk areas are: poverty,

ineffective parenting, inadequate home-learning environments, illiteracy, poor health care, malnutrition, lack of job skills, and abusive family situations. These factors can interact with each other to create potential or real negative stress on parents and children.

Poverty is one of the prevalent risks in the lives of young children. It not only reduces the family's ability to respond to its own basic needs, but also increases the potential for exposure to other risk, such as malnutrition and poor health (Garbarino, 1982; Thompson & Hupp, 1992). In effect, it sets into motion a pattern of living that can foster other stressors such as family abuse, illiteracy, and alcohol and drug abuse.

Parents who have to cope with poverty often will prepare their children for a similar experience, thus creating expectations that may lean to similar lifestyles for the next generation. Young children's skill acquisition indicates a need for preventative measures during affective development to avert problems such as low motivation, low task persistence, poor self-esteem, limited readiness skills, and delayed language abilities (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

The United States is one of the richest countries in the world, yet 21.5% (Luxembourg Income Status, 1995) of its children are living in poverty. We need to realize that all children must have a better chance at life if we plan to secure our own future. Our future depends on the education of our children.

Ineffective parenting is a serious risk confronting families during the early childhood years. Parenting is the key mediator by which families carry out problem-solving and form relationships (Swick, 1991).

Inadequate parenting constitutes another major risk factor during the early childhood years. It is often interrelated with ineffective parenting. While

there are degrees of inadequacy in any home-learning environment, families at risk often lack literacy materials, consistent rituals for nurturing healthy relationships, an interest in learning, a social system for sustaining learning resources to promote wellness, and strategies for fostering a positive social and emotional environment (Garbarino, 1982; Stinnett, 1981; Swick, 1991).

Poor health care threatens the entire family's well-being. Poor nutrition, lack of self-care skills, inadequate sanitation, lack of access to health care, and inadequate health-literacy skills create stressors that degrade the child's cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development (Boyer, 1991; Powers, 1985).

Health and wellness are the fabric of strong families and healthy societies (Stinnett, 1981). When this fabric is damaged in any family member, the entire family is at risk (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988). For example, malnutrition and poor health care can create severe stress in the child and in turn negatively influence the family's wellness (Blazer, 1989). Lack of knowledge and skills related to maintaining adequate health care is correlated with serious problems in young children, such as hearing impairments, chronic infections, and multiple social and behavioral dysfunctions (White, 1987; Woolston, 1991). The most severe damage to the child and the parent is the emergence of a pessimistic outlook on life. In effect, what may initially appear to be a risk may then embrace the family within a degrading cycle of poor health, family abuse, and antisocial behavior (Thompson & Hupp, 1991).

Poor health and poor nutrition are highly related. Malnutrition is among the risk factors most damaging to a child's development and learning. It also has a powerful social influence because eating and mealtime are a time

when parents and children can engage in "relationship building" experiences (Swick, 1991). Nutrition and family relationships are interactive forces.

Poverty and illiteracy create a context for inadequate job skills which, in turn, often contribute to unemployment and/or underemployment (Swick, 1991). While the intricacies of negative scenarios vary, their negative influence on parental competence and family viability is dramatic (Dimidjian, 1989). Unable to find employment or to project a long-range image of themselves as contributing members of a family or community, many of these parents become involved in a cycle of passive (continuing welfare dependence) and/or antisocial (illegal employment) behaviors that further erode their entire family's integrity (Schoor & Schoor, 1988).

Abusive family situations, whether it is chemical abuse or child or spouse abuse, place the entire family in a high-risk context (Garbarino, 1982). It is destructive of healthy family dynamics at any point during the life span (especially during the early childhood years), disrupting parent/child attachment and preventing healthy family bonding behaviors (Burgess & Streissguth, 1992).

These risk areas can be negative influences throughout the life span. They are particularly damaging when they permeate the lives of parents and young children during the formative years (Thompson & Hupp, 1992).

FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

For young children with developmental disabilities, family involvement is viewed as essential. Turnbull and Turnbull (1988) described family support and involvement in their child's special education program as:

> The pendulum has swung in many ways; from viewing parents as part of the problem to viewing them as a primary solution to the problem, from expecting passive roles to expecting active roles, from viewing families as a mother-child dyad to recognizing the presence and needs of all members, and from assigning generalized expectations from the professionals' perspective to allowing for individual priorities defined each family's perspective. (p. 21)

It was not until the last decade that family support and involvement in their child's special education program was seen as a target for public support. Due to professional and citizen's groups becoming active on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities, landmark legislation was approved through the passage of Pub. L. 94-142 of 1975 and Pub. L. 99-457 of 1986, children cannot be denied an education because they have a disability. Both laws specifically addressed family support as a requirement when providing intervention services for young children with disabilities. Bailey and Winston (1990) stated, "The family dimension of Pub. L. 94-142 and Pub. L. 99-457 emphasized the equal partnership role for parents and outlined certain responsibilities for parents for the purpose of enhancing services to children" (p. 318).

The passing of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: (IDEA), Part H of 1990, created major challenges and opportunities for the development and delivery of family-centered early intervention services to children with disabilities and their families. Part H is unique in that the family, in addition to the child, can be eligible for services. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is the mechanism that allows for expansion of intervention to include outcomes and services for families as well as their children.

A review of the literature reveals three major principles of family-centered practice that encompass current values and practice:

(a) establishing the family as the focus of services (Krauss, 1990: McGonigal, Kaufmann, & Johnson, 1991; Shelton, Jeppson, & Johnson, 1987), (b) supporting and respecting family decision-making, (Bailey, 1987), and (c) providing intervention services designed to strengthen family functioning (Dunst, Johaanson, Trivette, & Hamby, 1991; Kaiser & Hemmeter, 1988). These principles reflect a consensus of belief and value that provide a framework for best practice.

Family Patterns

The make-up of families and their expectations regarding the behavior of family members varies from family to family and culture to culture (Allen, 1992). Whatever the make-up of a family, those with a child with disabilities will feel the impact on family life. Some families are drawn closer together as they learn to adapt to a child's disability. Others are less able to cope and still others are pulled apart. At one time, the divorce rate was thought to be higher among families with a child with disabilities. However, recent research (Allen, 1992) reported that there is no difference in divorce rates when social-economic factors are held constant.

Evidence does exist that children with developmental disabilities are more likely to be the target of family abuse (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1980). Through no fault of their own, infants and young children with disabilities often behave in ways that are different and upset parents. For example, some infants with disabilities have high-pitched, inconsolable crying that seems to go on night and day. This behavior may put healthy parent-infant interaction in jeopardy (Frodi & Senchak, 1990). Peterson (1987) described this dilemma:

> A normal child living in a stressful environment with an abuse-prone parent can become disabled as a result of injury from abuse. On the other hand, a family with a child with a disability and without adequate support systems may incur enough stress to cause parents without abusive tendencies to abuse the child. In either case, awareness of the potential problem of child abuse is crucial for educators who deal with young children with disabilities and their families. (p. 424)

Support systems are a key factor in ensuring the well-being of families with children with disabilities.

Fewell and Vadasy (1986) found that families need the support of their immediate family members as well as extended family members, other relatives, neighbors, and co-workers. Additionally, support can be sought from less personal connections such as schools, agencies, medical facilities, and government policies.

Family Adjustments

Families do not plan to have a child with disabilities. They expect a healthy infant who will grow slowly but surely into an independent and productive adult. From the start, parents of children with disabilities are faced with adjustments. Allen (1992) cited the following concerns or realities that families need to confront in the caring of a child with a disability: (a) expensive medical treatment, surgery, hospitalization that may occur repeatedly and for extended periods; (b) heavy expenses and financial burdens other than medical such as special foods and equipment; (c) frightening and energy-draining crises, often recurring, as when the child stops breathing, turns blue, or has a major convulsions; (d) transportation problems, baby-sitting needs for the other children, time away from jobs to get the child with the disability to treatment appointments; (e) lack of affordable child care for families with

children with developmental disabilities; (f) continuous demands on parents to provide what are routine but difficult caregiving tasks; (g) constant fatigue, lack of sleep, little or no time to meet the needs of other family members; (h) little or no opportunity for recreational or leisure activities; (i) jealousy or rejection among siblings; and (k) marital problems arising from finances, fatigue, differences about management of the child's disability, feelings or rejection by the husband or wife that they are being passed over in favor of the child with disabilities.

Such problems suggest how nearly impossible it would be to provide effective intervention of a child with disabilities, without including the child's family. Services for families and children should provide families with the knowledge and skills that allow them to mobilize their resources, and assist families in acquiring the competencies that support and strengthen their families (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988).

BEST PRACTICES IN PARENT COMPONENTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

In early childhood education where parent involvement has been related to healthy development of the child, Davies (1988) pointed out that schools must take the initiative to reach out to parents and devise a wide variety of partnership-building strategies for them to participate. Swick (1991) found that as parents became involved in one mode of participation, their overall interest in other dimensions for the partnership increased.

Home Visits

Home visits have proved especially useful for working with parents of infants and toddlers and with families with children with special needs. Swick (1991) stated that home visits: (a) encourage parent and teacher to see the home as a learning environment; (b) allow for demonstrations of home-learning strategies in the setting where they are to be used; (c) sensitize the teacher to realities of each parent's situation; and (d) offer parents a chance to share their family's history.

In most descriptions of home visiting programs, the importance of strong interpersonal ties between the parents and the home visitor is emphasized, regardless of conventional or collaborative relations with parents. It has been argued that the way in which help is rendered is as important as the actual content of the help (Dunst & Trivette, 1988). The home visits should be focused on relationships between the home visitor and the parents. Both the parents and home visitor are active agents and experts in organizing, conducting, and evaluating the work; both have equal status in defining the nature of the problem, goals of the work, the problem-solving process, and the evaluation of its success (Tyler, Pargament, & Gatz, 1982).

Family-Guided Routines for Early Childhood Special Education

Teaching and learning within daily routines is not a "play and hope" model for working with young children, but a systematic approach to embed intervention consistently by all family and service providers throughout the day rather than in individual, therapy sessions (Woods-Cripe & Venn, 1997). When using the family-guided routines approach, routines are the context for intervention. The care providers (e. g., family members) identify preferred

routines which provide opportunities to teach and practice individualized goals. They then select and use a variety of strategies specifically chosen to support the child's skills development. The child's progress is monitored and shared with all care providers and service providers. For many young children with special needs, multiple care providers and service providers (e. g., parents, child care staff, early interventionists) are involved in the daily life of the child. Open and ongoing communication is required of both family members and professionals in order to ensure the program is implemented successfully and to plan for new outcomes (Donegan, Ostrosky, & Fowler, 1996).

Technology

Putting a telephone into every classroom might be one of the most effective ways to improve communication between families and teachers (U. S. Department of Education, 1994). Voice mail systems have been installed in several hundred schools across the country. Audio tapes and videotapes also are being used as alternatives to written communication for parents. These are especially helpful in reaching families who do not read.

Computers can help bring families and schools together. National Parent Information Network (NPIN) is a national electronic information service for parents, parent educators, and others working collaboratively with families. NPIN offers a continually expanding collection of parent-oriented materials, including short articles on child development, education and health issues and a question-answering service for parents. Currently, it is available to anyone with an Interment Connection.

Communication

Kesler (1989) reminded us that parents need to know what is happening if we expect them to support our efforts. Whether it is weekly or monthly newsletters, pictures of the program activities, or activity calendars of forthcoming classroom activities, special events, parent-teacher meetings, or an activity-a-day to do with their children, information provided for the parents needs to be ongoing to continue open-communication lines.

Ball (1985) suggested providing children and parents with a clear idea of how a program works by the use of brochures, videotapes, and newsletters. He recommended that teachers should introduce themselves to the families by sending personal notes to the children before school opens as well as holding opening-of-school orientation programs. Opening meetings should provide the families with the opportunity to get to know the person who cares about their children, the teacher. Ball stated, "Warm, supportive relationships are the foundation for long-term partnerships" (p. 107).

Additional partnership communication strategies include sending home weekly student-work folders, notes home on the events of the day or week, setting up a parents bulletin board near the most parent-traveled areas of the classroom or school, calling parents for monthly feedback, holding small-group parent dialogue times, holding morning coffee with parents or light meal socials, or helping parents develop a parent support newsletter for sharing concerns and support with other parents (Ball, 1985; Etlin, 1990).

Conferences

Scheduling and planning conferences related to parent needs is crucial. Conferences have the greatest chance of being successful if there

have been many other opportunities for communication during the rest of the year (Bundy, 1991). Both short, informal mini conferences and the more formal conferences offer multiple partnership opportunities such as sharing information, offering each other support, sharing and resolving concerns, and planning school-home-learning strategies (Swick, 1991).

Parents as Helpers

Parents as helpers range from parents doing short-term tasks such as reading to children to highly organized parent volunteer projects. The modeling influence of parents and teachers working together in the classroom is justification enough for the effort it takes to organize it (Coleman, 1987; Comer, 1986).

Lending Libraries/Learning Centers

Lending libraries and learning centers are two more early childhood resources that can promote family involvement. Typically, lending libraries contain games, books, tapes, and related resources that children and parents can borrow for home use. Varulli and Rogers (1985) described a learning center that is housed in a library system. It is organized with a room unto itself and is open for about 4 hours a day, with monthly themes. Activities utilize common objects such as kitchen utensils or other available library resources. These centers often become a launching pad for many other teacher/parent activities such as support groups, study groups, or adult education projects (Swick, 1991).

Multicultural Activities

Teachers and parents can be models for cultural sharing for children. Many activities can be used to promote this effort. For example, sponsor International Night where food, clothing, and customs are shared; organize parent resource teams where parents can share something about their heritage with the children and other parents; involve the children and their parents in doing family trees and then create a display of family histories in the community and bring parents together to learn about the importance of modeling positive multicultural attitudes and practices for their children (Fantini, 1982; Swick, 1991). Finally, teachers should recognize special events of all of the different cultural and ethnic groups in society. Developing a curriculum that uses cultural experiences and traditions is essential in our ever-chanting society.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS WITH PARENT COMPONENTS UTILIZING BEST PRACTICES

In order to create a safe and vital environment where everyone is respected, early childhood educators must structure their programs to address the needs of all families. The relationship that is built is the cornerstone to providing a successful program for their children. The following are some examples of successful early childhood programs that promote teacher-parent partnerships that strengthen home and school learning opportunities for their children and themselves.

Early Childhood Family Education

In Minnesota, an effective program at reaching parents from various socioeconomic groups is Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE). Since 1974, ECFE has included a strong parent component as well as implementing educational home visits to address the special needs of very young parents and high risk families (Junge, 1995). ECFE is a voluntary public school program for all Minnesota families with children between birth and enrollment in kindergarten. Currently, available through Community Education Departments, ECFE is in 380 school districts and four tribal schools in Minnesota available to 98% of families with young children (Dooley-Burns, 1995).

Dooley-Burns (1995) summarized five techniques that ECFE uses to successfully promote parent-child participation:

1. Parents and children attend ECFE activities together. It is an opportunity to spend quality time with each other participating in creative and developmentally appropriate activities.
2. Activities are provided at convenient times and locations. Programs are held at various times throughout the day and sometimes weekends. Program sites can include schools, churches, or other community facilities.
3. Programs address issues and concerns about children. Programs offer opportunities for problem solving, skilled observation of children, use of home learning experiences, learning the ages and stages of child development, and parent/child interactions.

4. Programs emphasize the importance of support from others. Parents learn that they are not alone in solving concerns and issues.
5. Programs provide a variety of components. Some of these include parent discussion groups, play and learn activities, special events for the entire family, home visits, school readiness programs, libraries of books, toys, and other learning materials, information on community resources for families and young children, and advisory councils that assist in program feedback and planning.

Head Start

Head Start, a federally-funded early childhood program for low-income children and families, has been in existence since 1965. It has served more than 11 million children with comprehensive services such as health, education, and social services (Lombardi, 1990). It has provided a model of parent participation by including parents in key roles as decision makers and as staff. It has provided critical leadership in bilingual-multicultural programming, parent education, and the mainstreaming of children with special needs.

Research has provided evidence that Head Start is an investment, not an expense. Data collected by the Silver Ribbon Panel of the National Head Start Association confirm Head Start's success. In the Silver Ribbon Survey, 90% of the parents indicated a positive program effect on their children and improvements in their parent-child relationships. In 1988-89, 99% of children enrolled 90 days or more completed medical screening and 98% of those

identified needing treatment received it; 98% of the children completed all the required immunizations or were up-to-date in their immunization;95% of the families received social services directly from Head Start or through referral to other agencies (Silver Ribbon Panel, 1990).

Mallory and Goldsmithe (1990) believed the program is successful because it includes comprehensive services, parent involvement and family support, a commitment to meeting local needs, training and technical assistance support, and a collaborative approach. It is through these services that Head Start maximizes the strengths of each child and influences development.

Encouraging and facilitating parent involvement is a mandated responsibility of Head Start staff. From the first day of enrollment, parents are expected to be involved. Head Start programs have a Parent Involvement Coordinator assigned. Each Head Start program encourages parents to:

- Volunteer in the classroom;
- Participate in teacher home visits at least twice a year;
- Enroll in job training programs, literacy programs, or other adult education;
- Attend parent education class;
- Serve on policy making bodies;
- Apply to work in the program;
- Serve in state, regional, or national Head Start Associations (Mallory & Goldsmith, 1990).

In 1989, over 443,000 parents volunteered in their Head Start programs and 36% of the staff were parents of current or former Head Start children (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990). Head Start

programs operate on the idea that to serve low-income children, family needs must be assessed and appropriate services provided (Mallory & Goldsmithe, 1990). It is through such family support that the program empowers parents as the primary educators of their children (Washington & Oyemade, 1987).

Home-Oriented Preschool Program

The Home-Oriented Preschool Program (HOPE) operated by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory from 1968-71, served 3- to 5 year-old children in rural West Virginia. The three components of the program were: daily television lessons, weekly group experiences for children in a mobile classroom, and weekly home visits by paraprofessionals using materials corresponding to the television lessons. Gotts (1989) tracked 212 families with 342 children from preschool through high school. Gotts (1989) found that HOPE prevented unfavorable emotional patterns ad personality characteristics in boys and enhanced self concept in girls. He also found significant academic gains for boys and girls. Favorable effects of the program on school-family relations were still apparent 12 to 14 years after it concluded. These improved school-family relations seem to help children be more receptive to learning and to perform better in school (Gotts, 1989).

High-Scope Perry Preschool Program

The Perry Preschool Program developed the High-Scope Curriculum, which promotes intellectual, social, and physical development, and allows children to initiate their own learning activities with support from teachers (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993). All teachers were certified in special education, and class size was kept to a maximum of six children. Class sessions lasted 2 1/2 hours, 1 to 2 times per week, for 30 weeks a year.

The High-Scope Perry Preschool study, with findings through age 27, revealed that high-quality, active-learning programs for young children living in poverty return $7.16 for every dollar invested, cut in half participants' crime rate, significantly increased participants earnings and property wealth as adult, and significantly increased participants commitment to marriage (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993). These findings support strongly the importance of appropriate early childhood programs.

The program included weekly home visits by the teacher with the parents as well as regularly scheduled group meetings. These visits involved the child as well as the parent discussing and modeling of activities like the child's activities in the classroom. The home visitors' focus was on the child and the parent/child relationship. The parent component of the program empowered the parents to support their children's development and to see them as active learners who were capable of learning

Parents as Teachers

Missouri's Parents As Teachers (PAT) program is a home-school community partnership designed to provide all parents of children from birth to age 3, then on to kindergarten entry, the information and support needed to give their children the best possible start in life (Winter & Rouse, 1991). It is based on the philosophy that parents are a child's first and most influential teacher, and that the school's role in the early years is to assist families in giving their children a solid educational foundation.

The PAT program's components consist of developmental screening, resource network, home visits, and group meetings. The developmental screening identifies problems and informs parents of their children's

development so appropriate interventions may be sought. The resource network links parents to resources in the community such as speech clinics, diagnostic services, programs for children and parents, lending libraries, health and mental health agencies or social service agencies. The home visits are done by certified parent educators trained in child development and child rearing techniques specific to the family are provided. The group meetings are held at convenient times and sites. The major purposes of the meetings are to provide additional input from the staff, outside speakers, and to create opportunities for families to share successes and concerns about their children's behavior and development (Winter & Rouse, 1991). Parent/child activities are included during many group meetings to reinforce the family interaction time. Some PAT programs have Drop In and Play components. This can be an important social outlet for families.

Another important characteristic which permeates the PAT program is the emphasis on the child's language development. PAT shows parents the importance of responding to the child's vocalizations and how to capture the teachable moments in everyday living to enhance language development.

Early in 1986, the decision was made to initiate a study of PAT called the Second Wave to examine the program's effectiveness. Participants included a wide diversity of families. The Second Wave study found that parents overwhelmingly prefer a parent education and family support program primarily based on home visits focused on the family's needs. Parents in all types of families became more knowledgeable about child development and child-rearing practices.

Successful early childhood family-oriented programs use a variety of approaches for involving parents and children in developing and carrying out

support and family strengthening activities (Davies, 1988; Powell, 1994). The programs reviewed are based on an equality of relationships where parents and professionals share and learn from each other (Swick, 1991). The parents reported feelings of satisfaction, increased feelings of confidence as parents, increased positive perceptions of school and staff, and positive perceptions of their children's competence (Gotts, 1989; Junge, 1995; Mallory & Goldsmith, 1990; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993). High regard, communication, and a mutual concern for growing through partnership are necessary components for this collaboration to occur successfully.

Chapter 3

SUMMARY

Are there best practices used in early childhood education that promote active participation of families in their children's education? The review of the literature provided a number of practices that have a positive effect on family involvement in their children's education.

In today's society, families face increased demands on their time, growing competition for their children's attention, and economic burdens that force more parents to work outside the home which severely limit the time they spend with their children (Swick, 1991). Whatever their struggles, parents from all backgrounds want their children to succeed. Many families are already educating their children for success in school and in the future. With encouragement and the use of best practices, many more can do the same.

The significance of the early childhood years is becoming more and more the focus of the helping professions and society. During the past 50 years, the knowledge of how children develop and learn has increased dramatically. This has prompted new ideas on how to increase a child's potential for growth and offering many opportunities for teachers and parents to make these years happy and meaningful for children (Skolnick, 1991). The initiation of partnerships begins by helping parents and teachers acquire an

understanding of their roles in supporting children's development and learning as well as their own growth (Boyer, 1991; Powers, 1985). The research reviewed clearly supports that families play a crucial role in both the home and school environments with respect to facilitating the development of intelligence, school achievement, and competence in their children.

The role of educators in shaping family involvement cannot be overemphasized; their attitudes and behaviors are critical factors (Cochran et al., 1986). Based on what is known regarding teacher characteristics that promote parent involvement, especially during the early childhood years, teachers who promote strong parent/teacher partnerships strongly believe in the vital role of parents in their children's education. They have engaged in specialized training related to having effective partnerships and are members of professional associations. They have the support of school leaders and are generally child and family oriented in their philosophy and teaching style. Finally, they are more active in actually pursuing long-term meaningful teacher-parent partnerships (Epstein, 1991; Galinsky, 1988; Powell, 1990; Swick, 1991).

Families of Children with Special Needs

As a result of the passing of Pub. L. 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children act of 1975, Pub. L. 99-457, an amendment to Pub. L. 94-142, schools have had to incorporate best educational practices into preschool services for children with disabilities.

Young children who demonstrate delays in several developmental areas may acquire the services of a variety of professionals. The transdisciplinary team model has been used successfully as a method to

coordinate these services and is characterized by a sharing or transferring of information and skills across disciplines (Orelove & Sobsey, 1987). Parents are full-fledged team members which calls for a high degree of family involvement in their child's educational program. The team members jointly assess the child, then work together to develop and implement the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Parents have important information regarding their child and provide valuable insight in determining educational goals (Allen, 1992). Parents, educators, and therapists share their knowledge and learn skills from one another, which enhances home/school communication, professional collaboration, and the child's educational program in general (Gallivan-Fenlon, 1994).

Early Childhood Programs

Successful early childhood teacher/parent partnerships are characterized by their focus on enhancing the quality of early learning and development (Swick, 1991). Dooley-Burns (1995) reported that Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) successfully promotes parent/child participation by providing activities for parents and children to attend together and spend quality time with each other, providing the activities at convenient times and locations, addressing issues and concerns important to the families, and emphasizing the importance of support from others. ECFE also provides a variety of components such as parent discussion groups, play-learn activities, special events for the entire family, home visits, school readiness programs, libraries of books, toys, and other learning materials, information on community resources for families and young children, and advisory councils that assist in program feedback and planning.

Head Start provides comprehensive services including health, education, and social services and extensive involvement opportunities for children and their families (Lombardi, 1990). Mallory and Goldsmithe (1990) reported that each Head Start program encourages parents to be involved by volunteering in the classroom, participating in teacher home visits, enrolling in a variety of adult education programs, attending parenting classes, serving on policy making bodies, applying to work in the program, and serving in state, regional, or national Head Start Associations.

Other programs such as the Home-Oriented Preschool Program, the High-Scope Perry Preschool Program, and the Parents As Teachers Program were reviewed in the literature. Each have common ground in relation to fostering positive partnerships. They focused on the child's learning; each used a variety of resources and strategies in involving parents; they involved parents in the planning and assessment process; each addressed the concerns of the families they were serving; and they fostered attitudes and activities that encourage long-term partnership (Gotts, 1989; Swick, 1991).

There are clearly significant effects of parent involvement on the general educational process. Parents develop more positive attitudes about school and school personnel, help gather support in the community for the program, become active in community affairs, develop increased self-confidence, and enroll in other educational programs (Becher, 1994). Teachers become more proficient in their professional activities, devote more time to teaching, experiment more, and develop a more student-oriented approach. Benefits for children who have parents involved include higher achievement, better attendance, improved attitudes, lower drop-out rates, improved high school completion rates, and higher college/university

admissions (Ziegler, 1987). Finally, the benefit of parent involvement are not confined to early childhood. It is important for parents to stay involved as their children progress through the school system (Bralts, 1995).

Chapter 4

POSITION

The literature and programs reviewed clearly supports that there are best practices used in early childhood education that promote family involvement. Early childhood educators have been the pioneers in addressing family involvement.

Best practices used in early childhood education have been reviewed by looking at families as learning centers, examining characteristics of parents and teachers that promote partnerships, and reviewing the qualities of effective early childhood programs with successful parent components. The various stressors and barriers to active family involvement with an emphasis on families with children with special needs was also examined.

Home Visits

Home visits are one of the most promising methods to make a positive impact on parents' and children's lives (Zigler, 1990). Home visitors range from volunteers and aides to trained nurses, social workers, and educators. They offer a range of services including guidance on health, nutrition, child development, and parenting as well as referrals to other agencies and services. Home visits are an integral part of a number of programs designed to teach parents child development principles they can use to stimulate their children's learning.

Family-Guided Routines for Early Childhood Special Education

The process for providing intervention within the context of family-guided routines is focused, systematic, interactive, and dynamic (Woods-Cripe & Venn, 1997). While there is no right or wrong way to implement a family-guided, routines-based approach, there are some basic steps that ensure the care providers and service providers are working collaboratively to support learning and development (Cripe, 1995). Service providers are there to support and assist families to achieve and maintain their primary role in their children's lives. The early interventionist/home visitor provides information, resources, demonstrations, and positive feedback to support the family members' teaching role.

Technology

Telephones and voice mail systems might be some of the most effective ways to improve communication between families and teachers (U. S. Department of Education, 1994). Audio tapes and video tapes are being uses as alternatives to written communication for parents who do not read. Computers can also be used to connect families and schools. The National Parent Information Network offers a continually expanding library of parent-oriented materials. It is available to anyone connected to the Internet.

Communication

Given the dynamic and complex lives of parents and teachers, a variety of communication techniques is needed. The list of communication strategies is endless. Kesler (1989) stated that parents need to know what is happening if we expect them to support our efforts. Whether it is weekly or monthly

calendars of forthcoming classroom activities or parent-teacher meetings, information provided to the parents needs to be ongoing to keep the communication lines open. Many schools are finding that training programs in which teachers and parents learn about communication skills and strategies are effective in increasing the positive involvement of parents (Swick, 1991).

Parents as Helpers

In spite of dramatic social changes and increased family demands, parents are finding ways to support children and teachers in enriching and strengthening the classroom environment (Coleman, 1987; Comer, 1986). Helping strategies range from parents doing short-term tasks such as reading to children to assisting with the preparation of classroom learning materials. The modeling influence of teachers and parents working together in the classroom is justification enough for the effort it takes in organizing it (Coleman, 1987; Comer, 1986).

Many schools are continually creating new arrangements for working with parents finding ways to make communication with families more personal and compatible with their needs, drawing on technologies, and using parents in new ways in the schools. But these new family/school partnerships need continuing support from other members of society, including community organizations, businesses, and government at all levels.

Early childhood programs with successful family involvement components are comprehensive and intensive. They deal with the child as part of a family, and the family as part of a neighborhood or community. The staff have the time, training, and skills necessary to build relationships of trust and respect with children and families. Becoming involved requires consistent

effort over a long period of time. Bralts (1995) explained that parent involvement must not be this year's new program that will be displaced by another next year. This author feels the key is to include many different ways for parents to participate, and not expect all parents to be involved in the same way. Minor involvement by parents may be the basis for more active involvement later.

The literature reviewed suggested teachers' collaboration with parents and work within a family context do not come about naturally or easily. There are multiple challenges at each level. Fortunately, research findings and lessons from model program offer promising directions for implementation of recommended practices that, in essence, call for a new era in the early childhood field's approach to families (Powell, 1998).

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