

2011 STAM – CCPRC Meeting
Workshop E2
November 17, 2011, 2:00-3:30 pm

Perspectives on Family-Provider Relationships and Family Engagement

Description

This session focused on findings from current research on understanding and measuring family-provider relationships and family engagement, and the implications of this research for efforts to improve child care quality. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the presentations offered several perspectives on these issues, including directors' views of supporting parents as an aspect of quality, parent and provider perspectives on establishing and maintaining relationships, the results of an initiative aimed to enhance communication between parents and providers, development of a new measure to assess the quality of family-provider relationships that focuses on provider facilitation of these relationships and includes both the parent and provider perspective, and parents' and providers' perspectives on family engagement based on the results of a self-administered questionnaire.

Facilitator

Nancy Margie, OPRE

Presenters

Monica Rohacek, Urban Institute
Katherine Speirs, University of Maryland
Herman Knopf, University of South Carolina
Toni Porter, Bank Street College of Education
Emily Moiduddin, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Scribe

Jennifer Cleveland, University of Minnesota

1. Documents in Session Folder

- “Ages & Stages Questionnaire Online: A Pilot Project to Support Quality Improvement and Childcare Provider/Family Communication;” Herman Knopf, Heather Googe, and Kshawna Askew
- “Defining and Measuring Engagement to Inform a Performance-Based Contract;” Emily Moiduddin
- “The Family-Provider Relationship Quality (FPRQ) Project;” Toni Porter and Nikki Forry (Presentation and Handout)
- “The Types of Relationships Parents and Center-Based Providers Form and How They are Negotiated;” Katherine Speirs

2. Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Monica Rohacek

- Monica discussed a study that examined quality from the perspective of directors. The study involved in-depth, in-person interviews with 38 center directors in four counties in Alabama, New Jersey, Washington, and California. Centers were selected to maximize variation in quality and contextual factors and involved observations in classrooms of three-year-olds and qualitative thematic coding and cross-case analysis across the 38 centers.
- Where and how do parents fit into directors' definitions of quality? Directors describe quality in terms of four dimensions: child outcomes, program structure and characteristics, teacher characteristics, and goals related to parents. Almost all directors said that a goal of their program is to prepare children for school, but they differed on what school readiness means. Directors noted that parents are important to quality.
- Directors talked about three goals: (1) Offering parents support and assistance in the forms of: delivering child care services so parents can work, connecting parents to community resources, offering emotional support, and providing advice about child development; (2) Involving parents in center activities or children's learning; and (3) Keeping parents happy. For some directors this was the only aspect of quality noted.
- **Summary of Presentation #2: Katherine Speirs**
 - Katherine discussed a study that examined the kinds of relationships created between center-based providers and parents. The study included qualitative data from two child care centers: one center primarily serves African-American families; the other center serves a larger, more diverse population. One-hundred observations were completed as were semi-structured interviews with parents and providers, directors, head teachers, and assistant teachers.
 - Five kinds of relationships were created: *basic familiarity* (recognizing names and whose child is whose), *working relationship* (starting to interact more frequently, more conversations, beginning to develop trust, but not yet working collaboratively), *partnership* (collaborative relationships with caregiving goals being established together), *independent relationships* (friendly relationships, but without an effort to coordinate caregiving practices), and *discordant relationships* (characterized by distrust, disagreement, and sometimes open conflict). Relationships were looked at in terms of three dimensions: collaboration, trust, and communication (frequency and nature).
 - Everyday strategies that providers (and parents) use include:
 - Introductions and small talk
 - Presenting themselves as warm and approachable
 - Explicitly stating expectations for frequent communication
 - Going out of the way to engage in and be available for communication
 - Working together to find common interests
 - Carefully selecting conversation topics and language.
 - Concluding points: Need to explore the value of relationships other than partnerships, especially independent relationships. Creating strong relationships requires time and effort from both parents and providers. How relationships are formed may differ across settings.

- **Summary of Presentation #3: Herman Knopf**
 - Herman discussed a project designed to increase the use of a teacher developmental screener, teacher use of individual child development knowledge when planning engagements with children, and the quality of caregiver/family communication. The pilot involved 30 child care programs that were participating in voluntary QRIS and were diverse in terms of geography, program size, and families served.
 - Features of the Ages and States Questionnaire (ASQ) online: Parties can log in and view questionnaires completed by others. The system automatically calculates scores and provides an ongoing record of developmental status. The teacher talks to the parent about the results.
 - Authors of the ASQ found that it is most effective to have teachers complete the questionnaire 3–4 times each year. After provider completes questionnaire, then the parent is prompted to use it.
 - Teachers were provided with iPads (initially they tried to use tablet PCs, but these were not user friendly because loading took too long). Laptops were provided to centers to make sure parents had access to the online ASQ.
 - Who participates? Four levels of family participation: high (70–95%, n=2)); moderate (37–50%, n=4); low moderate (11–25%, n=5); and low (0–6%, n=15).
 - Directors were interviewed about the system in open-ended interviews. They all commented about parent participation, and were not happy about it.
 - At the low family participation level, the relationship with parents is mostly business-related stuff, on an as-needed basis.
 - In moderate family participation, there were uniform, formally structured ways to communicate with families.
 - In high family participation, there was a family style relationship. These directors just don't take "No" for an answer and are comfortable talking with parents in a strict way.
 - Future directions: increasing participating programs from 30 to 100. Directors are requesting parent information sessions; the project is getting pediatricians more involved, collaborating with special needs, and planning to interview parents in the future.

- **Summary of Presentation #4: Toni Porter**
 - Project goal is to develop a measure to assess the quality of family–provider relationships in ECE settings for children 0–5. The project is a partnership between Child Trends, Bank Street, and the Erikson Institute with support from OPRE and the Office of Head Start.
 - The Family–Provider Relationship Quality (FPRQ) conceptual model: reviewed existing perspectives on family-provider relationships (family support, parent engagement and family sensitive caregiving); as well as literature from health, mental health, social work, family systems, ECE and K-12. Components of the FPRQ conceptual model include:
 - Factors that influence the family-provider relationship: characteristics of family/child/program/community and professional development.
 - Elements of effective provider facilitation of family–provider relationships: practices, attitudes, knowledge, and environmental features.

- Project examined 62 instruments, looking at structural features and content (constructs and elements).
- Gaps: applicability across settings, cultures and languages.
- Development of individual items: reviewed, selected and developed items; conducted focus groups with parents and providers; developed a self-administered questionnaire and environmental checklists; and doing an iterative process of cognitive testing.
- **Summary of Presentation #5: Emily Moiduddin**
 - Emily discussed a study designed to inform the performance-based contract between the funder (First 5 LA) and grantee (LA Universal Preschool). Steps included:
 - Developing shared definitions including a definition of engagement (which distinguishes between engagement and how programs support it).
 - Developing self-administered questionnaires (Spanish and English versions).
 - Testing of questionnaires: Questionnaires distributed to teachers and assistant teachers in the sample classrooms; 112/396 (28% response rate).
 - Sampled parents (not representative); 607/869 (70% response rate).
 - Findings: Parents were engaged in a variety of ways and teachers indicated that support for engagement was quite strong. Family child care programs were more likely to use e-mail to communicate with parents than center-based programs.
 - Climate measures designed for elementary settings were used: overwhelmingly positive responses (parents thought very highly of the programs).
 - Target development: base targets on what programs can do to support engagement; base determination of whether targets are met on director responses; and consider teacher and parent data for planning purposes.

3. Summary of Discussion with Presenters and Participants

- There are different levels of shared goal setting between parents and providers, and there are many different levels of provider and parent relationships. Center-based and family-based programs each have unique advantages and challenges when engaging with families.
- When parents are older than the providers, this can add another dimension to the relationship (Katherine).
- Did you notice children with special needs and the relationships? There were only a few children in one of the centers who had special needs (Katherine). The director saw it as an opportunity to support the parent. It brought the director and parent closer.
- Toni Porter: In a small case study I did with teachers, one of the things they were most nervous about was communicating bad news to parents. Supporting providers in these relationships is important. It would be good to learn more about the challenges they face.
- Parents are pushing for more academic types of things in classrooms. It's truly a worry to push infants and toddlers toward academic topics. This could fit in the context of shared goal setting (Toni).