

Supporting Family-School Partnerships in Rural Communities: Preliminary Results of a Randomized Trial

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Abstract

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008) is a family-school partnership intervention that has the potential to address some of the obstacles encountered when accessing services in rural communities. The purpose of the present study is to examine the *preliminary* effects of CBC on rural parents' and teachers' beliefs about and practices for addressing student social and behavior difficulties. Compared to parents and teachers in the control group, those receiving CBC demonstrated greater improvements in parenting practices, participation in problem-solving procedures, and the parent-teacher relationship (as reported by parents). The findings demonstrate the potential of CBC to build the skills and competencies of rural parents and teachers.

Introduction

- Proportionally, a greater number of children living in rural areas experience mental health problems compared to children living in urban settings (Lenardson, Ziller, Lambert, Race & Yousefian, 2010).
- Families in rural communities face challenges accessing supports (DeLeon, Wakefield, & Hagglund, 2003).
- Parents and teachers are essential for meeting the needs of students in rural schools.
 - Rural parents have fewer interactions with their children and teachers about school compared to parents in other geographic areas (Prater, Bermudez, & Owens, 1997).
 - Teachers in rural schools often report feeling ill-equipped to provide services to students with behavior concerns (Monk, 2007).
- Few studies are available that focus on building rural parents' and teachers' skills and capacities to collaboratively address students' mental health and behavioral concerns.
- *Conjoint Behavioral Consultation* (CBC; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008) is a family-school partnership intervention that addresses some of the barriers associated with access to services in rural settings.
- Decades of research have demonstrated the efficacy of CBC in diverse settings. The utility of CBC for *building competencies among rural parents and teachers* has not been investigated.
- The purpose of the study is to examine the *preliminary* effects of CBC on rural parents' and teachers' practices and beliefs immediately following the intervention and over time (one year post-CBC).

Method

Participants

- The present subsample is derived from the first three years of implementation of a four-year randomized controlled trial (RCT).
- Participants in the RCT included Kindergarten through 3rd grade students (*n*=180) and their parents and teachers (*n*=105) from schools in Midwestern rural communities.
- Teachers were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups, and all students within a classroom were assigned accordingly.

Procedure

- Within CBC, a consultant met with a teacher and the parents of 1 to 3 students for CBC meetings via a 4-stage process:
 - Needs Identification
 - Needs Analysis/Plan Development
 - Plan Implementation
 - Plan Evaluation

Measures

- Measures include:
 - Parent Teacher Relationship Scale (PTRS; Vickers & Minke, 1995)
 - Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Dadds, Maujean & Fraser, 2003)
 - Parent Efficacy for Helping the Child Succeed in School (PEHCSS; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005)
 - Participation in Problem Solving Scales (TPPS, PPS; Sheridan, 2004)

Analysis Plan

- Repeated measures *t*-tests evaluated change in scores from pre- to post-test.
- Multilevel modeling assessed longitudinal differences between treatment and control groups.

Results

- Results from *preliminary* analyses suggest promising effects of CBC for rural teachers and parents (see Tables 1 and 2).
- As a function of participation in the intervention, *parents in the CBC group* compared to parents in the control group demonstrated **significant decreases in their use of inconsistent discipline** strategies, and greater **improvements in positive parenting practices**, participation in **problem-solving**, the **relationship with their children's teachers**, and **beliefs that they can help children** be successful (see Table 1).
- Over time (i.e., *during the intervention and 12 months following participation*), the parents who received CBC demonstrated a significantly greater positive rate of change for the use of **constructive parenting practices** compared to the parents in the control group (see Table 2).
- Compared to teachers in the control group, *teachers who participated in CBC* reported **greater involvement in problem-solving** procedures during their time in the intervention.

Table 1

Significant Pre-Post Change Immediately Following CBC

Measure	<i>n</i>	Pre		Post		<i>t</i>
		M	SD	M	SD	
PEHCSS	100	4.53	0.52	4.72	0.57	-3.32**
PPS	PPPS 99	4.23	0.82	5.00	0.54	-5.37**
	TPPS 101	3.97	0.83	5.37	1.01	2.35*
APQ	Positive Parenting 100	4.35	0.47	4.40	.46	-2.00*
	Inconsistent Discipline 100	2.00	.0.52	1.83	0.47	2.07*
PTRS-Parent Report	100	4.29	0.64	4.51	0.51	-3.01**
	Joining 100	4.43	0.60	4.57	0.51	-2.43*
Communication-to-Other	100	3.95	0.93	4.35	0.66	-2.92**

p*<.05 *p*<.001

Table 2

Significant Long-Term Outcomes

Effect	Est.	SE	DF	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
APQ: Positive Parenting					
Intercept	4.35	0.05	69	95.76	<.01
Time	0.05	0.20	248	2.31	0.02
Group	0.08	0.07	248	1.11	0.27
Time*Group	-0.06	0.03	248	-2.04	0.04
APQ: Inconsistent Discipline					
Intercept	2.00	0.05	69	40.54	<.01
Time	-0.11	0.02	248	-5.50	<.01
Group	-0.09	0.08	248	-1.17	0.24
Time*Group	0.11	0.03	248	3.51	<.01

Discussion

- Preliminary results demonstrate CBC as a potential effective intervention for addressing the needs of parents and teachers in rural communities:
 - Rural parents receiving CBC reported greater engagement over time in their children's education and improved parenting practices and self-efficacy.
 - Teachers in rural schools reported improvements in effective problem solving during participation in CBC.
- Limitations of the study include:
 - Data represent three years of a four-year randomized clinical trial. Full interpretation of results is not possible.
 - Only significant findings are presented in the current study.
 - Results are limited to one rural region.
- Future research is necessary to:
 - Discern unique characteristics of rural settings that impact the implementation and effects of CBC.
 - Determine the conditions under which CBC is most effective.
 - Examine the efficacy of CBC in "authentic" practice contexts.

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