Measuring Early Childhood Partnerships: A Pilot Study

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INTRODUCTION

- The success of inclusive Early Childhood (EC) programs for young children with disabilities is dependent upon effective partnership between the adults involved (Lieber et al., 1997).

- Partnerships in EC programs can be limited and challenging as both the EC and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers may not understand what their roles look like (Chang et al., 2005; Dinnebeil et al., 2009; Friedman et al., 2012).

- Specific descriptions of the qualities and skills needed by EC and ECSE teachers to support and advance a partnership are not addressed in national personnel preparation guidelines (CEC/DEC, 2008; Division for Early Childhood, 2014; NAEYC, 2009).

- A model of EC partnerships can explain how EC and ECSE teachers' characteristics and skills contribute to effective EC-ECSE partnerships, and ultimately outcomes for children with disabilities in inclusive programs.

- Key components believed to influence EC teachers' and ECSE teachers' contributions to effective EC-ECSE partnerships include:
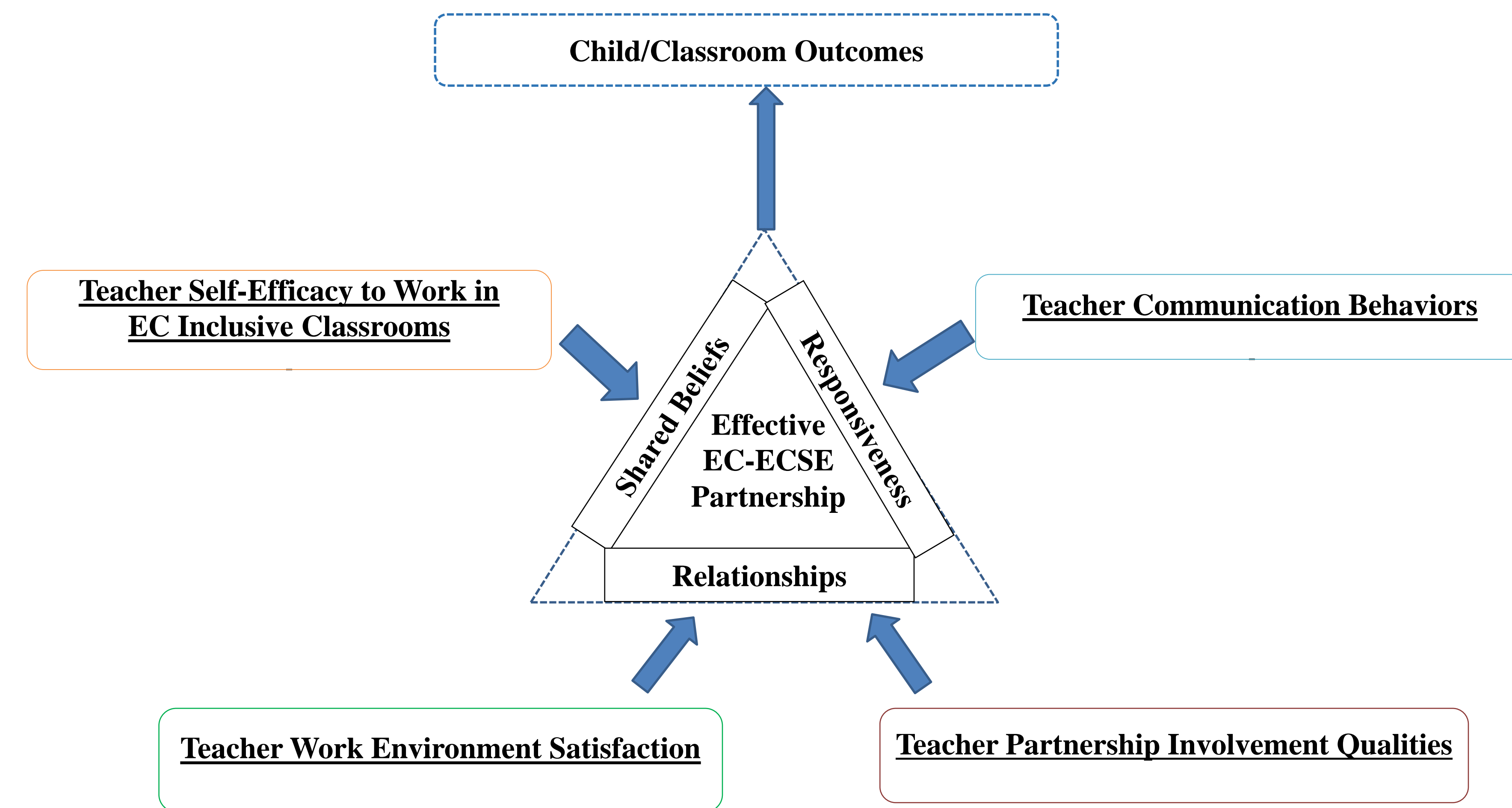
- Valid measures exist to assess: (a) EC teachers' self-efficacy to work in inclusive programs (Sharma et al., 2011), (b) EC teachers' work environment satisfaction (Bloom, 2005), and (c) EC teachers' communication behaviors with an EC coach/consultant (Knoche & Bainter, 2011).

- **No valid measures exist for assessing EC teachers' partnership involvement qualities, and EC-ECSE teachers' perceptions of an effective EC-ECSE partnership**.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what degree do teacher self-efficacy, work environment satisfaction, partnership involvement qualities, and communication behaviors contribute to effective EC-ECSE teacher partnerships?
   1a. What EC Teacher qualities contribute most to effective EC-ECSE partnerships?
   1b. What ECSE Teacher qualities contribute most to effective EC-ECSE partnerships?

2. What is the relationship between EC Teacher contributions and ECSE Teacher contributions to effective EC-ECSE partnerships?

PURPOSE OF PILOT STUDY

Determine the reliability of two new tools:

- **Effective EC-ECSE Partnership Scale:** A measure of the EC and ECSE teachers' perceptions of specific qualities of effective partnerships, e.g.. *relationships*, *responsiveness* and *shared beliefs* during their work-related interactions.

- **EC Teacher Partnership Involvement Qualities Scale:** A measure of specific principles of *engagement*, *observation and practice*, and *adult learning* that EC teachers demonstrate during their interactions with ECSE teachers to support children with disabilities in inclusive preschool classrooms.

METHOD

Participants
- Fifty-four EC teachers working in inclusive preschool classrooms.
- Twenty-six ECSE teachers employed in itinerant coach/consultant or co-teacher roles in public school inclusive preschool classrooms.

Measures
- Effective EC-ECSE Teacher Partnership Scale: 27 items rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly disagree) (EC and ECSE versions).

- EC Teacher Partnership Involvement Qualities Scale: 27 items rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (never, sometimes, most of the time, always).

Procedure
- Online surveys administered via *Qualtrics*
- EC teachers completed the Effective EC-ECSE Teacher Partnership Scale and EC Teacher Partnership Involvement Qualities Scale
- ECSE teachers completed the Effective EC-ECSE Teacher Partnership Scale.

Analysis
- Cronbach's alpha calculated for each sub-scale to determine internal consistency.

RESULTS

Table 1
Reliability Estimates for Effective EC-ECSE Partnership Scale

Sub-Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Sample Items
Relationships (11 items)		
EC teacher	.83	*This teacher and I are partners in this inclusive early childhood education effort.*
ECSE teacher	.90	*This teacher's contributions are useful to me in defining my role and goals for children and/or families.*
Responsiveness (11 items)		
EC teacher	.67	*This teacher asks questions about implementation of teaching skills/intervention strategies.*
ECSE teacher	.89	*This teacher clearly communicates his/her beliefs about working with children and/or families.*
Shared Beliefs (5 items)		
EC teacher[a]	.24	*This teacher and I have similar beliefs about inclusion of children with disabilities in preschool classrooms*
ECSE teacher	.70	*This teacher's ideas about primary goals for specific children are similar to my own ideas.*

[a] EC teacher version indicated the *relationships, and responsiveness* sub-scales had reliable set of items, while items in the *shared beliefs* sub-scale were not reliable. ECSE teacher version indicated that all three sub-scales had reliable set of items.

Table 2
Reliability Estimates for EC Teacher Partnership Involvement Qualities Scale

Sub-Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Sample Items
Engagement (8 items)	.74	*To explain my concerns or progress, I shared observations with the ECSE teacher using descriptions or documentation based on my time spent with children in my classroom.*
		I provided feedback on the helpfulness of the ECSE teacher's demonstration of teaching skills/intervention strategies, and/or other information provided.
Observation & Practice (8 items)	.74	*The ECSE teacher and I used our time together to systematically observe the classroom environment for possible modifications needed for children.*
		I observed the ECSE teacher demonstrate teaching skill(s)/intervention strategies that I could use with children in my classroom.
Adult Learning (11 items)	.76	*I discussed with the ECSE teacher his/her observations of my use of teaching skills/intervention strategies with children.*
		I summarized information/feedback provided by the ECSE teacher periodically during our meetings.

- All three sub-scales had reliable sets of items.

IMPLICATIONS/NEXT STEPS

- Both scales appear to provide reliable measures of the respective constructs, i.e., effective EC-ECSE partnership and partnership involvement qualities.

- New items need to be added to the *shared beliefs sub-scale* of Effective EC-ECSE Partnership scale

- Future research will involve large scale data collection with EC-ECSE teacher dyads to validate these measures further, and evaluate the contributions of EC teacher components, i.e. *self-efficacy, work satisfaction, and partnership involvement qualities* to *effective* EC-ECSE partnership.