

Caregiver and Teacher Verbal Interactions during Consultation on Child Outcomes



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Background

- Public schools are facing increasing pressure to serve a growing number of students with autism using research supported practices.
- Many teachers are undertrained in autism spectrum disorders and thus, require additional education and support.
- Research is lacking on the use of consultation for students with autism. Even less is available on the process or what happens during consultation and how this might predict consultation outcomes.
- Understanding the influences of caregiver and teacher involvement during consultation can inform best practices and guide future research in consultation interventions.

Objectives

- To characterize caregiver and teacher verbal interactions during parent-teacher consultation and examine relationships between verbal interactions and child outcome variables.

Methods

- The data come from a randomized single blind controlled study of parent-teacher consultation outcomes (Ruble, McGrew, & Dalrymple, 2009).
- An experimental group of 18 children ages 3 to 9, their teachers, and their caregivers received conjoint (parent-teacher) consultation at the start of the school year.
- The teacher and caregiver participated in a 2.5 to 3 hour COMPASS consultation (Ruble & Dalrymple, 2002) that was audiotaped and transcribed.
- Teachers received 4 additional follow-up coaching sessions throughout the school year.
- The first phase of the consultation was selected for data analysis of parent and teacher verbal interactions. This step involved discussion of the child's personal and environmental protective and risk factors which were applied in intervention planning.
- All speech acts and exchanges were segmented and coded using the Psychosocial Processes Coding Scheme (Sheridan, et al., 2002).
- Reliability of the segmenting and coding was determined using percent agreement.
- The correlations of four types of speech acts and three types of speech exchanges were analyzed (Table 1) against child outcome. Child outcome was based on direct observational rating of child progress toward IEP objectives developed during the consultation. Goal attainment scaling (GAS) was used to judge child progress toward skill acquisition. The GAS rating was completed at the beginning of the school year (Time 1), and then again at the end of the school year (Time 2). The difference between the GAS scores at Time 1 and Time 2 was used as the outcome variable.

Results

- An inter-rater reliability of 85% (range 81% - 98%) was achieved for segmenting and 93% (range 91% - 96%) for coding.
- Following the consultant, parents produced the second most frequently occurring speech acts (29.8%) and exchanges (29.5), while teachers produced the third most (25.8 and 25.5, respectively).
- Of the speech acts, the highest majority was collaborative for both parents and teachers.
- Of the speech exchanges, the highest majority was affiliative for both parents and teachers.
- No parent speech acts or exchanges correlated with child outcomes.
- A direct and significant correlation ($p < .01$) was found between teacher collaborative speech acts and child outcomes.

Discussion and Conclusion

- Understanding the influences of parent and teacher verbalizations during consultation can help inform the planning and effectiveness of parent-teacher consultation.
- This study provides preliminary evidence on importance of consultation processes that are designed to elicit collaborative statements from teachers.
- These results are one of the few examples demonstrating a relationship between teacher verbalizations and child educational outcomes.
- The results provide evidence that when teachers work collaboratively parents, the students have better outcomes.
- Future research should continue to examine the relationships between teachers and parents and the outcomes of students.
- Future research should also continue to explore consultation as a proactive intervention for increasing positive outcomes of students.

Table 1. Definition and Examples of Codes in PPCS

Involvement			
Distancing		Affiliative	
Controlling	Withdrawing	Collaborative	Obliging
<i>Directly influences the consultation but causes distance between the speakers. Examples: Controlling, Countering, Resisting others, Rejecting other responses</i>	<i>Does not directly influence the consultation but causes distance between the speakers. Examples: Evading, Delaying Participation, Reluctant Submission, Nonparticipation</i>	<i>Directly influences the consultation and is affiliative in nature. Examples: Mutual Affirmation, Constructive Elaboration, Initiations of Joint Activity, Exchanges of Information</i>	<i>Does not directly influence the consultation and serves the function of preserving social relations in group. Examples: Going along with others, Willing submission, Seeking Support</i>
<i>"There is always some kind of purpose for that behavior so we need to talk some about the behavior thing at home."</i>	<i>"Right. But she could consult with that doctor you know?"</i>	<i>"Exactly what you said, we look down and we say "what are some of the influences that may be" and you say "cousins that play rough."</i>	<i>"You all go right ahead. I don't care."</i>
<i>"So, let's just go through them"</i>	<i>"Actually he does that independently..."</i>	<i>"The only thing he likes on pizza is pepperoni."</i>	<i>"Ok, that sounds like a good idea"</i>

Table 2. Percentage of Speech Acts and Exchanges across Participants

Speaker	Number of Speech Acts (%)	Number of Exchanges (%)
Consultant	6021 (42.9)	4101 (43.5)
Parent	4187 (29.8)	2786 (29.5)
Teacher	3618 (25.8)	2406 (25.5)
Other	214 (1.5)	145 (0.02)
Total	14,040	9,438

Table 3. Percent of Parent and Teacher Speech Acts and Exchanges

% Total	Speech Acts				Speech Exchanges		
	Collaborative	Obliging	Controlling	Withdrawing	Affiliative	Distancing	Mixed
Parent	85.5%	11.8%	0.2%	1.9%	94.1%	0.5%	5.4%
Teacher	87.7%	9.2%	.47%	2.1%	93.5%	.25%	6.3%

Table 4. Correlation between Percent of Parent and Teacher Speech Acts and Exchanges and Child Outcome

	Speech Acts				Speech Exchanges		
	Collaborative	Obliging	Controlling	Withdrawing	Affiliative	Distancing	Mixed
Parent	.12	.09	-.16	.16	.23	-.22	-.24
Teacher	.65**	-.46	-.23	-.23	.46	.26	-.49