

Collaboration in Special Education

Parent–Professional Training

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Mrs. Harrison sat at her daughter Ivy's annual individualized education program (IEP) planning meeting and struggled to focus on the speech therapist while he discussed his report. Did he say that Ivy needed to work on social pragmatic skills? Mrs. Harrison did not realize that Ivy was having social problems. She seemed fine at home. While Mrs. Harrison pondered this new and worrisome information, she realized that Mrs. Jennings, Ivy's teacher, was asking her a question: Did she realize that Ivy had not been handing in her reading homework? Mrs. Harrison felt a sinking feeling. She had been so busy shuttling her sons back and forth to soccer practice that she had not been as vigilant as she should have been about Ivy's homework. Ivy needed so much help with her homework—she was so far behind the other third graders. Wasn't Ivy supposed to do her homework independently? Maybe she could ask Ivy's teacher to modify the homework. Wasn't that the teacher's responsibility? Could she ask for that? But by now, Mrs. Jennings was finished and the principal was speaking. They had to move along—their schedule included another meeting in 20 minutes. Mrs. Harrison felt a mixture of anger and frustration. Didn't anyone want to hear what *she* had to say?

That afternoon, Mrs. Jennings reflected on Ivy's IEP planning meeting. She was concerned about Ivy's reading

scores and had hoped to enlist Mrs. Harrison in a home-based reading program. She had sent a note home with Ivy the previous week, but Mrs. Harrison never replied. Mrs. Jennings had spent hours researching reading strategies that could help Ivy build her decoding skills, but Mrs. Harrison did not seem interested in hearing about them at the meeting. Of course, Mrs. Harrison did find time to call after the meeting was over and complain that Ivy's homework needed modification. The homework was indeed too difficult for Ivy. Mrs. Jennings wondered whose job it was to modify homework—should she do it, or should the special education teacher do it? Oh well, she had no time to worry about that problem now. She had a mountain of paperwork to finish and papers to grade before she could go home for the day.

Scenarios like the fictional one described in the preceding paragraphs are not uncommon when parents and teachers come together to plan for a student—particularly when the student has a disability. Misunderstanding, miscommunication, and a lack of knowledge and skills can hinder relationships

between teachers and parents (Keyes, 2000). Yet when parents and educators are able to work together in a collaborative partnership, positive student outcomes result (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Giles, 1998; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). A large body of literature discusses parent–teacher collaboration in special education (see box, “What Does the Literature Say About Parent–Teacher Collaboration in Special Education?”). This article describes a 4-year-long training project designed to foster successful partnerships between school personnel and parents of children with disabilities through joint parent–professional training.

Description of the Project

This project endeavored to provide parents and professionals with accurate information about the special education process to foster effective collaboration in planning and implementing educational programs for children with disabilities. From 2002 through 2005, a university research and training center partnered with 10 parent advocacy agencies in Connecticut to deliver a 9-hr course on the special education process to more than 1,300 parents and educa-

What Does the Literature Say About Parent-Teacher Collaboration in Special Education?

Students whose parents are involved in their education show higher academic achievement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Patrikakou, 2004); improved attendance, higher aspirations for postsecondary education and career development (Caplan, Hall, Lubin, & Fleming, 1997); improved social competence (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001); and lower rates of adolescent high-risk behavior (Resnick et al., 1997). These findings hold true for families of all races, ethnicities, income levels, and educational backgrounds (Henderson & Mapp; Jeynes, 2005).

Parents of children with disabilities are in a unique position to become involved in their children's education and to develop partnerships with educators. In fact, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004) requires a high level of parental involvement, especially in the development of IEPs. IDEA expects parental involvement at every stage of the process—from assessment to goal development to progress monitoring. Yet, many parents do not play a meaningful role in developing their child's IEP (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002; CSDE, 2004; Johnson, Duffett, Farkas, & Wilson, 2002; SEELS, 2004).

A variety of factors may influence the creation of successful parent-school partnerships. Teachers may feel overtaxed in their jobs and may resent the added burden of dealing with parents. They may view parents as underappreciative, adversarial, or as simply lacking interest (Keyes, 2000). Parents may be unfamiliar with special education procedures and relevant language, may lack an understanding of the limitations of the school and the teacher's limitations and may be reluctant to question school personnel about the supports and services available to their child (Lytle & Bordin, 2001).

Race and ethnicity play a role in parents' levels of participation in their children's school program. Parents of African American and Hispanic students are less likely than parents of White students to be involved in their child's education (Child Trends, n.d.; Desimone, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Cultural differences may affect beliefs that influence the creation of equal partnerships, including beliefs related to the authority of teachers (Keyes, 2000), parental lack of familiarity with the U.S. education system, differing views regarding parental involvement in schools, differences in communication styles, limited English proficiency

(Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002), and differing cultural perceptions of disability (Lamorey, 2002). For example, 63% of Korean American parents and one third of Chinese American parents attribute their children's disabilities to divine or supernatural causes, a belief that conflicts with the predominantly biomedical view of disability that most educators in the United States hold (Lamorey).

A lack of collaboration and problem-solving skills on the part of educators may also hinder the process of developing partnerships between parents and educators (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). Both of the national associations that accredit and set standards for teacher preparation programs, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC), have indicators aimed at increasing parent involvement. Yet teachers receive limited preservice education in collaborating effectively with families (Broussard, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Shartrand, Weiss, Krieder, & Lopez, 1997; Wright, Daniel, & Himelreich, 2000). Some states have responded to these needs by offering training to parents, educators, and administrators on such topics as collaborative decision making, negotiation, cultural diversity, and multiparty dispute resolution. Parents and educators who take part in these training sessions show improved ability to work collaboratively (Feinberg, Beyer, & Moses, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Studies have shown that improved relationships between parents and school personnel reduce the incidence of legal proceedings initiated by families to challenge their children's educational programs (Feinberg, Beyer, & Moses).

One method of fostering effective collaboration in schools is to train parents and school personnel together (Espe-Sherwindt, 2001; Gross et al., 2003; Webster-Stratton et al., 2001). In addition to developing increased ability to collaborate in planning individual student programs, participants in joint parent-professional training have more positive attitudes and higher expectations of students with disabilities (Colling, Fishbaugh, & Hermanson, 2003). High expectations for student achievement are strongly correlated with student success (Jeynes, 2005).

tional professionals in almost two thirds of Connecticut's school districts. The course included modules in

- The laws that govern the special education process.
- Planning IEPs.
- Person-centered planning.
- Family-school partnerships.

The training design emphasized the importance of collaboration between parents and professionals in creating successful educational programs for children with disabilities. In addition, this project targeted groups that have been underrepresented in training and IEP development, including inner-city families, Hispanic families, and African American families. The project has

resulted in a training network that has continued to provide instruction for parents and education professionals throughout Connecticut after the project ended.

Project initiation

In 2002, the first year of the project, university staff partnered with Arc/CT, a disability rights advocacy organization,

USE Training Modules

Module 1: Steps in the Special Education Process. This module walks participants through each step of the special education process, from the referral to creating and monitoring the IEP. It highlights the different perspectives of school district personnel and families.

Module 2: Laws and Process Affecting Special Education. This module reviews the major education laws that pertain to students with disabilities. These laws include IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and No Child Left Behind. Studies indicate that clear understanding of special education laws reduces conflicts between schools and families (Feinberg et al., 2002). This module includes a number of optional group activities that reinforce course content, including an IEP Jeopardy game.

Module 3: The Individualized Education Program. This module focuses on the development of the IEP, emphasizing the critical importance of parent participation in the process. It reviews key components of the IEP, including procedural safeguards, evaluation, transition planning, and writing measurable goals and objectives. Giving parents training in the IEP process allows them to participate with knowledge, skill, and confidence.

Module 4: Person-Centered Planning. This module introduces the philosophy and practice of person-centered planning, a highly effective method for generating opportunities for all IEP members to participate in the planning process (Keyes & Owens-Johnson, 2003). Educators using person-centered planning methods can design questions that respect the unique qualities of individuals and their families, including disability, race, gender, class, culture, language, and sexual orientation (Keyes & Owens-Johnson; Marrone, Hoff, & Helm, 1997). Person-centered planning methods help families articulate their priorities for their child and promote collaboration among team members.

Module 5: Family School Partnerships. True family-school partnerships require an understanding of the relationship's core components, commitment to shared responsibility for its success, and the ability to approach challenges to the partnership as opportunities to enhance the student's educational outcomes. This module introduces participants to strategies for working collaboratively for the benefit of students with disabilities.

to recruit 10 parent advocacy groups to participate in training initiatives. Each participating agency selected one parent of a child with a disability and one professional (teacher, social worker, psychologist, related service staff member, or administrator) to participate in a train-the-trainers session to prepare them to present the course to parents and professionals in their communities. The individuals selected had experience in negotiating the special education process. The children of the parent-trainers represented a wide range of disabilities, including learning disability, intellectual disability, social emotional disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and speech-language impairment; and the educational professionals worked with students in all disability categories.

University staff conducted a train-the-trainers seminar to prepare the 10 training teams (each consisting of one parent and one professional) to deliver the training course to larger audiences of parents and professionals. The 2-day seminar included an overview of the course modules, principles of adult learning, and instructional strategies for presenting the material. These trainers practiced presenting the modules under the guidance of trained project staff and had access to mentors for further training on an as-needed basis.

The Curriculum

In the first year of the project, trainers followed the Understanding Special Education (USE) curriculum developed by the Parent Education Advocacy

Training Center (PEATC, 2000). PEATC staff trained trainers in the curriculum. Program enhancements during the second year of the project included modifying the modules to include more specific information about federal and state laws and regulations and expanding the module on person-centered planning. In 2004, the training incorporated changes in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004; see box "USE Training Modules" for a description of the training modules).

Training Procedures

Agencies received a \$1,500 stipend for each 9-hour-long training course that they conducted. Each training course included a minimum of 12 participants. The agencies could spend the funds on food, materials, parent stipends for child care and transportation costs, and trainer stipends. Since materials and parent stipends usually exhausted the available funds, trainers usually volunteered their time to prepare for and present the trainings.

Individual training teams tailored the presentation of the curriculum to the needs of their communities. The teams conducted training in Spanish for Spanish-speaking participants, and materials were available in both Spanish and English. Some trainers used PowerPoint to present the material, whereas others preferred to present the material by using handouts or overhead slides. Many training teams developed large-group or small-group activities to reinforce curriculum content. For example, one team illustrated the IEP process by presenting case studies of students. Another team used PowerPoint to create an "IEP Family Partnerships Jeopardy" game (see Figure 1). Some teams staged mock IEP meetings, during which volunteers read from prepared scripts, acting out a nightmare IEP meeting, in which everything went wrong, as well as a dream IEP meeting, for which everyone had the skills and knowledge that they needed to fully participate. Figure 2 shows an introduction to the mock IEP meeting. University staff collected these materials so

that they were available to all trainers in the project.

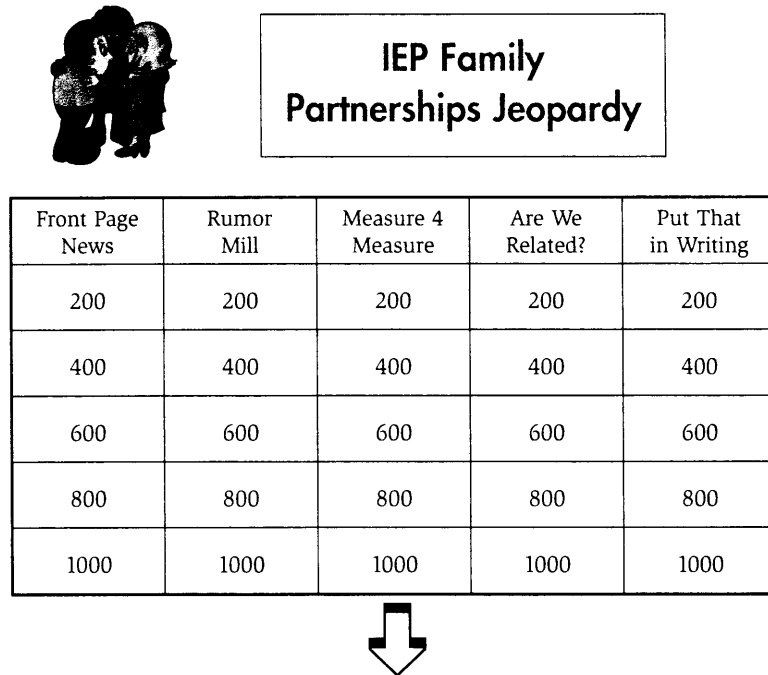
Trainers had the option of presenting the course in either two or three sessions, which they could schedule during the day, in the evening, during the week, or on a weekend. All training sessions included meals or snacks; and some trainers provided door prizes, resource materials (articles, books, lists of Web sites, etc.) and other incentives to increase participation. Professional training participants earned continuing education units (CEUs).

Training teams held the sessions in a variety of community locations, including schools, churches, community centers, and libraries. Many training teams provided child care at training sites. The teams recruited college students or community volunteers to entertain and supervise children while parents attended the training session. In some instances, the training sessions turned into community events that included potluck suppers or barbecues, guest speakers, and time set aside for socializing. All participants in the training received a copy of the book *Negotiating the Special Education Maze* (Anderson, Chitwood, & Hayden, 1997).

Training Participants

Over the 4 years of the grant, 1,328 participants from 103 of Connecticut's 169 towns (61% of the towns) completed the training course. In Year 1 of the project, university staff used data collection forms from PEATC's USE curriculum, as required by the agency funding the project. This form recorded participants' basic demographic information, including role (parent or professional), race/ethnicity, child's age and disability, and the town or district where training was conducted. In the second year of the project, with the approval of the funding agency, project staff revised the data forms to include information about the time that the child spent in general education, whether the child attended his or her home school, the child's participation in extracurricular activities and, for professionals, the location where they provided most of their services.

Figure 1. IEP Family Partnerships Jeopardy



Sample question:

Measure 4 Measure – 200

Three types or sources of information that may be included in an initial evaluation.

What are:

formal or standardized assessments; informal observations; review of schoolwork; review of records; review of evaluations conducted by persons outside the school system; interview of parents/support staff?

Of the 1,328 people who attended the training, 703 (53%) returned data forms providing demographic information. On the basis of information on the sign-in sheets, collaborating agencies reported that 193 African Americans and Caribbean Americans participated in training sessions during the 4 years of the project; however, only 21% ($n = 39$) of this group completed data forms. Agencies also reported a total of 185 Hispanic participants; 57% ($n = 106$) of this group completed data forms. Trainers reported attendance of 709 participants who were White; of these, 65% ($n = 465$) completed data forms. Table 1 gives further information about the participants.

Lessons Learned

The purpose of this project was to provide parents and professionals with accurate information about the special education process and to help them gain skills so that they could collaborate effectively in planning educational programs for children with disabilities. We sought to create a thriving training network by preparing parents and educators to deliver the curriculum in their communities. During this process, we learned valuable lessons about how to plan, execute, and evaluate the training process.

Lesson 1: Invest in Relationships

When the project began, university staff had strong preexisting relationships with many of the state's parent advoca-

Figure 2. Introduction to Mock IEP Exercise

Read to the audience: Jill is a 12-year-old girl with an intellectual disability. She recently transitioned to middle school and is experiencing difficulties both academically and socially. In elementary school, Jill had a few friends and participated in after-school activities with them. She had been making progress in the general education curriculum, with modifications for her individual needs. Jill is lonely this year, and her work overwhelms her. Her friends from last year are on another school team, and Jill has not made any new friends. Her special education teacher recently sent home a report saying that Jill is unable to keep up with the curriculum. The school team believes that Jill now needs to be educated in the resource room because of the academic demands. Jill's parents want her to stay in the general education class with more intensive supports. The team is meeting today to review her progress and current placement.

Nightmare IEP Meeting:

Instructions to the players (not read to the audience): In this role-play of a nightmare IEP meeting, the meeting begins 20 minutes late. There is no agenda, and no one introduces the mother to the other participants. The meeting is in a small and stuffy room. Team members read their reports and then rush out of the meeting because they do not have coverage. The mother is too embarrassed to ask participants to stay for the rest of the meeting or to say that she does not understand the reports, which contain much jargon and many tables of data. The educators propose recommendations, and the mother accepts them even though she is not comfortable with them.

(Script follows)

Dream IEP Meeting:

Instructions to the players (not read to the audience): In this role-play of a dream IEP meeting, the meeting begins and ends on time and the agenda is clear. The room is comfortable and large enough to accommodate the group. The team leader reviews ground rules (cell phones off, all opinions welcome, treat one another with respect). The team leader introduces each team member with a brief description of his or her role. Because the staff reviewed their reports with the parents before the meeting, the meeting focuses on what to do. Participants use everyday language, rather than jargon, and explain unfamiliar terms. The parent feels comfortable asking questions and offering opinions. The team leader facilitates the meeting so that participants can hear all viewpoints and so that the participants can reach a consensus.

(Script follows)

We sought to create a thriving training network by preparing parents and educators to deliver the curriculum in their communities.

cy groups through work on previous projects. Enlisting support and participation from local school districts proved to be more challenging. During the first 2 years of the project, many training sessions lacked significant educator participation; most participants in the sessions were parents. University staff addressed school district reluctance by meeting with district administrators (principals, superintendents, special education directors, etc.) to review the curriculum, present training materials and consumer satisfaction data, address administrator questions and concerns, and emphasize the project's goal of increasing collaboration between educators and parents. As a result, district

personnel generally became eager to participate in the training and took leading roles in recruiting participants.

Lesson 2: Do Your Homework

In the first year of the project, training teams presented PEATC's USE curriculum exactly as written. Early evaluations of the sessions indicated that training participants varied widely in their background knowledge of the topic areas, their experiences with professional development seminars, and their personal histories with the special education system. As a result, university staff learned to listen to the trainers, who lived and worked in the communities where training was presented. In districts where participants possessed a great deal of background knowledge, university staff worked with trainers to incorporate more advanced content into the curriculum, provide resource materials, or bring in expert speakers. In other districts, the trainers varied the instructional techniques to include

small-group activities, role-playing, case studies, and videotapes.

Lesson 3: Provide Support to Trainers

The university attempted to recruit trainers who were leaders in their communities, were skilled at navigating the special education system, and were comfortable with public speaking. Most trainers possessed one or two of these characteristics, but rarely did they possess all three. After an initial large-group training session, project staff provided individualized instruction and mentorship to training teams on the basis of their specific needs. Project staff observed teams at least twice during the first year, and staff provided additional training in content areas and public speaking on an as-needed basis through tutorials, coaching, articles and videotapes, and role-playing. The staff encouraged less-experienced trainers to observe seasoned trainers for one or more sessions. Additional training and mentorship for teams ranged from 3 hr

per year (several 1-hr-long observation and reflection sessions) to more than 12 hr per year (meetings with experienced trainers to review curriculum, role-playing public-speaking techniques, and observation and reflection sessions).

Lesson 4: Keep Data Systems Simple

The return rate of the university's data forms varied widely across communities. Trainers reported that some participants felt uncomfortable sharing information about their families in writing; others thought that the forms were too lengthy or complicated. Some participants did not see the value of providing data; still others were unable to complete forms because of limited literacy. The overall return rate represented just over half (53%) of participants.

Factors that could have improved data collection include the following:

- Emphasizing the importance of data collection to trainers.
- Providing staff support at training sessions to distribute forms.
- Providing direct support to participants to complete forms.

Social Validity

Schwartz and Baer (1991) have noted that assessing the social validity of an intervention is the key to anticipating its acceptance or rejection by consumers. An important part of evaluating this project was collecting data on the acceptability of the training goals, procedures, and outcomes (Schwartz & Baer) to parent and professional participants. This process included distributing consumer satisfaction questionnaires, as shown in Figure 3, to participants at the end of training sessions. The questionnaire contained 17 statements; participants marked their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale in which 1 represented strong disagreement and 5 represented strong agreement. The questionnaire also asked respondents to complete four open-ended questions. Participants returned a total of 515 consumer satisfaction forms, representing a return rate of 39%.

Table 1. Race/Ethnicity of Training Participants as Reported on Data Sheets and by Trainers

| Race/Ethnicity | <i>n</i> = | Percentage | Percentage of Connecticut Children With Disabilities ^d |
|--------------------|------------|------------|---|
| Data Sheets | | | |
| White | 465 | 66.1 | 65.7 |
| African American | 39 | 5.5 | 16 |
| Hispanic American | 106 | 15.1 | 16.5 |
| Asian American | 7 | 1.0 | 1.1 |
| Native American | 2 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Other ^b | 10 | 1.4 | 0.4 |
| Prefer not to say | 74 | 10.5 | — |
| Total | 703 | 99.9 | 100 |
| Trainer Reports | | | |
| White | 709 | 53.4 | 65.7 |
| African American | 193 | 14.5 | 16.0 |
| Hispanic American | 185 | 13.9 | 16.5 |
| Other/not reported | 241 | 18.1 | 1.8 |
| Total | 1328 | 99.9 | 100.0 |
| Total non-White | 378 | 28.4 | 32.5 |

^aConnecticut State Department of Education, 2004. ^bBiracial, European American, Filipino American, Black American, and mixed.

Most participants (93%) indicated that they were satisfied with the training sessions. The percentage of respondents who marked "agree" or "strongly agree" to any questionnaire item ranged from 86.6% ("I learned enough to implement the concepts into my work") to 99.8% ("The presenters were knowledgeable about the subject"). Questionnaire responses indicated that most participants found the training content to be relevant and useful (89%). Most participants believed that they gained applicable knowledge and skills from the training (see Table 2). Many respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the training materials and methods (92.1%–98.7%).

Two research assistants independently coded responses to the open-ended prompt "The knowledge and skills I learned today will be useful to me to _____." The most common responses included "Advocate more effectively for my child/student" (21.5%) and "Help others through the IEP process" (11%). These data, shown in Table 3, suggest that participants

found that the goals and procedures of this project were acceptable and socially relevant—an indication that this training model is a valid one to use with parents and professionals in Connecticut.

Final Thoughts

Successful parent-professional partnerships result in improved outcomes for students, but many parents and professionals require training to develop the skills necessary to form effective relationships. Not only was this project successful in addressing the training needs of parents and educators who support students with disabilities, but it also encouraged a positive outlook on future collaboration for many of them. As one participant commented, "[This training] has given me the power of knowledge and the ability to anticipate the future with hope."

The training course furnished information on special education law and processes to facilitate meaningful parent involvement in IEP development. The project used a joint parent-professional training model and provided col-

Figure 3. Consumer Satisfaction Questionnaire

**Understanding Special Education
Consumer Satisfaction Questionnaire**

Please circle your answer to each statement.

| ABOUT THE TRAINING | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. Objectives of the training were met. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. All topics on the agenda were addressed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. The materials (e.g., readings, overheads) were relevant to the training content. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Adequate illustrations and examples were used during the presentations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Time was well organized. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. The information is relevant and can be applied to my work situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I believe that I now have a better understanding of the subject presented. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| ABOUT THE PRESENTER(S) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. The presenter(s) were well prepared and organized. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I learned enough to implement the concepts into my work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. The presenter(s) used a variety of activities that corresponded with the content. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. The presenter(s) were easy to listen to. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. The presenter(s) valued our input. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| ABOUT THE CENTER | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. My questions about the topic presented were answered. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I received the needed information on the topic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I learned enough to implement the concepts in my work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I would recommend this training to others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I was satisfied with the training. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Would you use the UConn Center for Developmental Disabilities again? | | Yes | | No | |

Your comments

The thing I found most helpful about the session was _____

The session would have been better if _____

The knowledge and skills learned today will be useful to me to _____

Other comments: _____

Table 2. Selected Consumer Satisfaction Questionnaire Items

| Questionnaire Item | Percentage of Respondents Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed |
|--|---|
| The information is relevant and can be applied to my work situation. | 89.0 |
| I believe that I now have a better understanding of the subject. | 96.1 |
| My questions about the topic presented were answered. | 93.3 |
| I received the needed information on the topic presented. | 94.3 |
| I learned enough to implement the concepts in my work. | 86.6 |
| I would recommend this training to others. | 95.5 |
| I was satisfied with the training. | 93.0 |

laboration strategies to maximize home-school partnership outcomes. University staff and trainers were able to tailor recruitment strategies, training content, and session activities to the individual needs of each community. The project also successfully targeted underrepresented groups for training, although the data collection system underestimated their participation.

Consumer satisfaction data indicate that participants found the training curriculum useful and the procedures acceptable, thereby validating the training model for use with Connecticut professionals and parents of children with disabilities. Participants indicated that they would use what they learned in a variety of ways, with nearly a quarter of participants (21%) reporting that they would be more effective advocates for their children or their students. In addition, 11% of the participants reported that they would use what they had

learned to help others through the IEP process. A follow-up survey is currently under way to assess the long-term impact of the training project.

Successful parent-professional partnerships result in improved outcomes for students, but many parents and professionals require training to develop the skills necessary to form effective relationships.

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Table 3. Written Responses to an Open-Ended Prompt

The knowledge and skills I learned today will be useful to me to _____

| Write-In response | Percentage of Respondents | Interrater Agreement ^a |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Advocate more effectively for my child/student | 21.5 | 92% |
| Help others through the IEP process | 11.0 | 100% |

^a(agreements/agreements + disagreements) × 100.

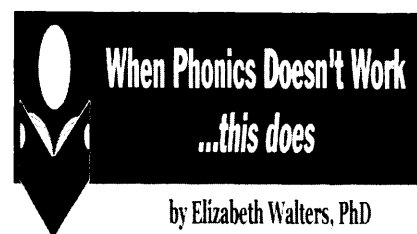
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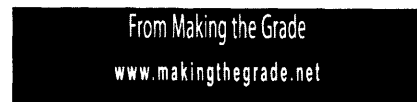


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