

在三種不同學前教育環境中親師溝通實務之探討

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中文摘要

當特殊幼兒來回就讀於自足式的學前特教班級與社區融合班級或托兒所時，家長經常面臨的挑戰就是如何與這些不同教育單位的老師溝通。本研究是確認在不同的學前教育類型之下家長與教師間溝通的相似性與差異性。本研究以家長填答問卷方式，以瞭解在自足式學前特教班、社區本位學前班、以及社區托兒所，於最近四個星期內有關親師間溝通的頻率、形式、及溝通主題等狀況。研究結果顯示社區本位的學前班與社區托兒所中部分特殊幼兒家長的背景可能是導致不同親師溝通的原因，再者，這三種類型的學前教育機構在親師間溝通形式與內容上有顯著的差異。就讀於自足式的學前特教班幼兒的家長較喜歡透過連絡簿與定期家訪的方式和老師交換孩子的行為問題與進步的狀況；相對的，孩子就讀於社區本位的學前班與社區托兒所的家長反應，他們是透過每天接送小孩時短暫的面對面、園所定期刊物、孩子的勞作品、或通知單來瞭解園所的相關活動，偶爾教師也會以電話或安排正式的親師會談來讓家長瞭解孩子的活動與發展的情況。然而，在許多特殊幼兒同時就讀兩種不同形式的學前機構時，一般社區形式的單位的親師溝通的形式，恐怕就無法完全滿足特殊幼兒的家長。因此，在實務上應用上，建議接受特殊幼兒的學前園所須依照特殊幼兒家長與其家庭狀況調整溝通的方式與次數，以滿足特殊幼兒與其家長的個別需求。

關鍵字：親師溝通、特殊幼兒

Introduction

Early intervention has been proposed as an array of professional services that in partnership with families are designed to promote the well-being of infants, toddlers and young preschool age children who present

delays in development or have identified disabilities. These services may vary in their design and frequency from family to family because of individual family and child needs, as well as the accessibility of local early childhood education settings (Thurman, 1997).

Federal legislation (IDEA, 1997) and recommended best practices in early

intervention (DEC, 1993) call for services to be provided for children and families in the least restrictive and most “natural” environments. Furthermore, as the number of dual-career and single-parent families has increased (Children’s Defense Fund, 1994), families of children with disabilities have often had to consider an inclusive community preschool or child care to meet their needs. The children are often dually-enrolled and travel each day between early intervention and community child care or preschool programs (Donegan, Ostrosky & Fowler, 1996).

Although the number of children with disabilities enrolled in community-based programs is likely relatively small compared to segregated early intervention program enrollment, the numbers are increasing each year (Lamorey & Bricker, 1993; Thurman, 1997). Transitions from infant-toddler intervention programs to preschool special education programs often include a transition from segregated or even home-based services to integrated, inclusive group programs in community (Hadden & Fowler, 1997). Parents are often left with the challenge of adapting to the different schedules, program goals, and practices at each setting. Communication patterns, in particular, between parents and professionals may vary in type, frequency and focus from early intervention programs to community-based settings (Ostrosky, Donegan, & Fowler, 1998).

Early Intervention programs

Early Intervention programs for young children have a history of providing frequent communication with parents about their

children’s developmental progress (Craig, 1997; Hadden & Fowler, 1997). The purpose of these programs, in fact, is to assist parents in optimizing children’s development or minimizing the potential negative impact and provide “individualized” intervention services (Bailey, 1994). Parents are often involved with staff to assess their children’s specific developmental needs and monitor their progress and discuss long-term objectives. Individual meetings between parents and staffs are standard practice in early intervention programs as IFSPs and IEPs are developed or reviewed (Cattermole & Robinson, 1985; Fuqua, Hegland, & Karas, 1985).

In addition, daily or weekly contacts between parents and staff may take the form of face-to-face conversations at the intervention sites or during home visits (Sicley, 1993), or written forms in daily journals (Runge, Walker & Shea, 1975) or written notes (Williams & Cartledge, 1997), or phone calls/messages as staff describe routine or special events that children can not describe themselves (Fuqua, et al., 1985). Written forms of communication and phone calls often fill the need for exchange of information about the children’s progress (Minner, Prater, & Beane, 1989). Furthermore, children’s medical needs may also prompt frequent contacts between staff and parents. Finally, a philosophy of family-centered services in early intervention programs requires that frequent contacts are made with parents to continually assess changing family needs and strengths (Bailey, 1994).

Community preschool and child care programs are designed to provide care and

education for groups of young children with typical development. Although individual children and families are certainly of interest to the staff in early childhood education, the homogeneity of the group and a holistic philosophy often promotes a collective approach to practices (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Craig, 1997, Thurman 1997). Drop-off and pick-up times offer providers and parents opportunities to exchange and clarify information. However, research on the conversations between parents and preschool staff at arrival and departure times revealed that conversations were generally short, informal and seldom focused on individual children's needs or accomplishments (Endsley & Minish, 1991; Tizard, Mortimore & Burchell, 1981).

Individually scheduled meetings between parents and staff at the school/center or in the family home are often a less frequent practice in these early childhood education and care settings than in early intervention programs (Craig, 1987). Instead, teachers in community programs often keep in touch with parents through the use of parent education classes or periodic conferences (Maxim, 1997), notices posted on bulletins boards near building/classroom entrances (Marion, 1993), weekly or monthly newsletters (Hildebrand, 1997; Maxim, 1997), theme/story bags (Helms, 1994), journals (Harding, 1996), and relaying information via phone calls (Henniger, 1981), and the children themselves (Bradbard, Endsley, & Mize, 1992).

The similarities and differences in parent-teacher communication practices at each of these early childhood programs can influence

the ease with which families and children transition between them. Knowledge of the specific differences can allow parents of children with disabilities and staff in early intervention programs to appropriately anticipate the need to discuss preferences and expectations for parent-teacher communication. As parents and children with disabilities in a given community enroll in new or dual early childhood settings, assumptions may be made that geographic local as well as professional titles (i.e. "preschool teacher") will assure shared philosophies and practices in communicating with families.

The purpose of the present study was to compare the parent-teacher communication practices in a segregated early intervention program, and other early childhood education and care programs in a given community. Specifically, parent-reported practices and preferences relative to the frequency, form, and content of communication between the professionals and parents were compared across three types of early childhood settings, including a public school district's early childhood special education (ECSE) program for 2 to 5 year old children with disabilities, three private preschools, and three large child care centers.

Methods

Participants and sites

The directors of the public school special education program, six private preschool programs, eight private child care centers from the community, and the local Head Start

program were invited. The private education and care programs were invited because they were accredited by the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Sixteen directors consented to participate in the study and distribute printed surveys to parents of the children enrolled in their programs.

Children enrolled in the ECSE program were 2 to 5 years of age and had either (a) disabilities as identified under state guidelines for special education programs ($n = 332$) or (b) typical development as defined by the local school districts criteria for enrollment as "peer models" ($n = 78$). The children attending the private preschool programs were 2 to 5 years of age and attended these preschool programs 2-5 days a week for 2 to 5+ hours a day.

Survey Instrument

A 40 item survey was developed to gather information about (a) basic demographic information about the children, programs and families, (b) how parents had communicated with their children's teachers or care providers over the past four weeks and the parents' preferred forms of communication with these professionals.

Data Collection

Surveys were distributed via the teachers and were carried home by children to a total of 860 families. The packet included the survey along with a cover letter to explain the purpose of the study and give parents explicit direction to complete and return the surveys. The first follow-up letters to parents were distributed two weeks after the initial distribution of the surveys. The second follow-up letters were distributed after two additional weeks had passed.

Data Analyses

Survey data were coded and entered into the computer by a research assistant. Twenty percent of the surveys were randomly selected, coded and entered into the computer for a second time by a second independent research assistant. Point by point agreement for coding and data entry was 98.4%; all noted data entry errors were corrected before the data were analyzed. The data were analyzed using the SPSSX¹ statistical package. Comparisons were made among the three groups using the Chi square for k independent groups ($\alpha < .05$). An adjusted alpha (.05/k comparisons) was used for items which were not orthogonal.

Results

A total of 373 surveys were completed and returned (43%). There were 206 parents of children enrolled in the ECSE programs, 62 parents with children enrolled in the private Preschool programs and 105 parents of children enrolled in the Child Care programs.

Demographics

Differences were noted among the three groups of parents for their children's program attendance, the families' characteristics and the ages and abilities of their children. Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic data for each group.

Table 1

Descriptive Information About Programs, Families and Children in Three EC Programs

		<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>Child Care</u>
		n= 206 (%)	n=62 (%)	n=105 (%)
<u>Program Enrollment</u>				
days*	daily	64	60	39
	2-3 days/week	5	26	41
	other	10	--	10
	missing data	20	15	10
hours*	1-2.5 hours	81	23	16
	3-4.5 hours	12	15	7
	5+ hours	1	45	63
	missing data	6	18	14
<u>Families</u>				
<u>Respondent</u>				
occupation*	Homemaker	32	13	4
	skilled/technical	35	8	19
	professional	28	69	66
	college student	4	10	11
	unemployed	0.5	0	0
respondent education*	no diploma	2	--	--
	high school grad	22	7	5
	some college	29	7	29
	college grad	35	45	49
	graduate school	11	42	18
spouse's occupation*	employed	81	76	80
	unemployed	3	18	10
	no spouse	16	6	10
primary language*	English	98	77	95
	other	2	23	5
# children in home*	one	16	32	30
	more than one	84	68	70

		<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>Child Care</u>
		n= 206 (%)	n=62 (%)	n=105 (%)
<u>Children</u>				
gender	boys	55	55	51
	girls	45	45	49
age*	0-3 years	10	13	29
	3 years	27	26	29
	4 years	38	36	36
	5 years	25	25	6
non-disabled		19	92	95
disabled*		81	8	5
	speech-language	61	60	60
	mental retardation	5	--	--
	behavior disorder	5	--	--
	orthopedic	5	--	20
	hearing loss	4	--	20
	others	19	40	--

*p< .00

Programs. The three groups reflected three types of programs designed for the young children. Whereas children enrolled in ECSE programs reportedly attended half days, children enrolled in Preschool and Child Care programs tended to enroll for full days ($\chi^2 = 175.014$, $df = 6$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, more than one-half of the children enrolled in the ECSE and Preschool programs attended these programs daily. However, over one-third (38%) of the children enrolled in the ECSE programs were simultaneously enrolled in child care programs compared to only 6% to 7% of the children in the other groups who were reportedly dually enrolled in preschool and child care programs.

Families. A few significant differences were noted for the families associated with each

group (see Table 1). More families of children enrolled in the ECSE program had (a) parents who with more than one child did not work outside the home, (b) single parent homes, and (c) parents with lower education levels. In contrast, the parents representing children enrolled in Preschool and Child Care programs had significantly higher education and occupation levels ($\chi^2 = 61.793$, $df = 12$, $p < .05$; and $\chi^2 = 61.245$, $df = 8$, $p < .05$), and more single child households, ($\chi^2 = 27.012$, $df = 6$, $p < .05$).

Children. The ECSE group represented 39(19%) peer models and 167(81%) children with disabilities. Significantly fewer children with disabilities were represented in the Preschool and Child Care groups ($\chi^2 = 211.282$,

df = 4, $p < .05$) with these proportions (5-8%) being comparable to the state incidence of disability among 2-5 year olds (Nebraska Department of Education, 1996). Speech and language impairments were the most prevalent disabilities in each group with over one-half of the children represented in the ECSE group presenting these disabilities.

Parent-Teacher Communication Practices

Over 93% of the parents in each group

reported having had some communication with their children's teachers and care providers. The form of communication used by parents and professionals in each program varied in terms of frequency and in who initiated the communication. Table 2 provides a listing of the various forms of communication during a recent 4 week period are presented for each of the three groups.

Table 2

Frequency and Initiators of Various Forms of Communication Between Teachers and Parents Over a 4 week Period

		<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>ChildCare</u>		<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>ChildCare</u>
		(n=206)	(n= 62)	(n=105)		(n=206)	(n= 62)	(n=105)
		(%)	(%)	(%)		(%)	(%)	(%)
<u>Forms</u>	<u>Frequency</u>				<u>Initiation</u>			
Note/ memo***	daily	13	3	35	teacher**	57	68	74
	weekly	23	36	22	parent	21	12	11
	not used	23	21	16				
Letter	daily	2	--	--	teacher*	21	37	32
	weekly	5	11	4	parent	5	3	1
	not used	74	61	67				
Journal/ Notebook***	daily	43	16	9	teacher***	48	17	14
	weekly	11	--	4	parent	16	2	1
	not used	36	81	85				
Newsletter***	daily	2	--	2	teacher**	49	76	63
	weekly	21	34	15	parent	2	--	1
	not used	51	24	35				
Bulletin boards***	daily		13	9	teacher***	6	39	49
	weekly	0.5	11	21	parent	1	--	2
	not used	3	61	50				
		94						
Child's art or memento**	daily	22	27	36	teacher	64	63	73
	weekly	43	24	30	parent	5	7	4
	not used	32	31	23				
Phone * conversation	daily	47	--	10	teacher*	23	5	19
	weekly	3	--	13	parent	20	34	25
	not used	57	61	55				

		<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>ChildCare</u>			<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>ChildCare</u>
		(n=206)	(n= 62)	(n=105)			(n=206)	(n= 62)	(n=105)
		(%)	(%)	(%)			(%)	(%)	(%)
Voice mail*	daily	1	--	--	teacher*	18	5	12	
	weekly	2	2	6	parent	17	30	29	
	not used	65	66	60					
Email	daily	--	--	--	teacher	1	--	--	
	weekly	1	3	--	parent	1	2	1	
	not used	98	98	99					
Message from child	daily	31	31	36	teacher	13	12	7	
	weekly	6	5	11	parent	14	7	14	
	not used	73	80	79					
Message from caregiver*	daily	0.5	2	16	teacher***	5	11	28	
	weekly	0.5	7	8	parent	2	6	12	
	not used	93	84	61					
Message from bus driver*	daily	--	--	--	teacher*	6	2	--	
	weekly	--	--	--	parent	4	--	--	
	not used	91	98	100					
Face to face***	daily	24	48	63	teacher	47	46	40	
	weekly	13	26	19	parent**	34	48	54	
	not used	19	7	7					

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Form and frequency of communication.

Over three-fourths of the parents in the Preschool group and one-half of the parents in the Child Care group relied on verbal information provided by the children themselves (26% and 15% respectively) or the teacher (50% and 35%) daily. The parents in the ECSE group reported a greater reliance on the daily printed materials(journals) and formal but less frequent contacts with teachers such as home visits, than did the parents of the other groups.

The journal or notebook was reportedly used on a daily basis by nearly one-half of the parents in the ECSE group and on a weekly basis by another 11%; less than 20% of the parents in the Preschool or Child Care groups reported daily or weekly use of this form of communication (see Table 2). However, newsletters appeared to be a weekly occurrence in preschool programs but used significantly less frequently in ECSE and Child Care programs ($\chi^2 = 35.134, df = 4, p < .05$). Simple written notes were reported by the majority of the parents in all three groups. Finally, the

parents in the Child Care group reported the use of posted notices and announcements on bulletin boards significantly more often than did the parents in the ECSE or Preschool groups ($\chi^2 = 69.319, df = 4, p < .05$).

Verbal messages delivered by the children were reported on a daily basis for approximately one-third of each group and few were delivered through another adult (caregiver or bus driver) (see Table 2). In addition, art products or the mementos of special events brought home by the children were daily sources of information for some parents in the Preschool and Child Care groups ($\chi^2 = 20.935, df = 4, p < .001$). Electronic forms of communication were used occasionally in each group. Parents affiliated with Preschool programs were least likely to report use of phone conversations or messages; over one-half of the parents in the ECSE and Child Care programs reported having had a phone conversation with teachers during the past 4 weeks ($\chi^2 = 21.288, df = 4, p < .05$).

Initiator of communication and reasons.

The most frequently reported forms of Table 3

Teacher and Parent Reported Reasons for Initiating Communication Between Parents and Teachers Over a 4 Week Period.

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Teacher-Initiated</u>			<u>Parent-Initiated</u>		
	<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>ChildCare</u>	<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>ChildCare</u>
	(n = 206) %	(n = 62) %	(n = 105) %	(n = 206) %	(n = 62) %	(n = 105) %
Describe child's problem(s)	65	72	68	61	65	65
Ask about child's progress	36**	11	24	64	55	65
Discuss child's health	23*	37	41	31*	45	45
Discuss recent family event	16	18	17	36	36	45

communication initiated by parents in each group were face-to-face contacts, phone calls and written notes (see Table 2). A significantly greater number of parents in the ECSE group reported initiating communication with teachers by using the journal or notebook ($\chi^2 = 89.253, df = 6, p < .001$). Parents in the Child Care programs were more likely than parents in the other two groups to initiate phone calls to teachers ($\chi^2 = 17.718, df = 4, p < .05$ and $\chi^2 = 15.865, df = 4, p < .05$).

Table 3 provides a summary of the most common reasons that parents in all three groups had initiated communication with teachers. Significantly more parents in the Preschool and Child Care programs had initiated communication with teachers to discuss their children's health, or ask about routine or special activities at school ($\chi^2 = 8.125, df = 3, p < .05$ and $\chi^2 = 7.450, df = 2, p < .05$). Parents in the ECSE group were more likely to initiate communication with teachers for a meeting or a scheduled conference ($\chi^2 = 29.305, df = 2, p < .001$ and $\chi^2 = 17.469, df = 2, p < .001$).

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Teacher-Initiated</u>			<u>Parent-Initiated</u>		
	<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>ChildCare</u>	<u>ECSE</u>	<u>Preschool</u>	<u>ChildCare</u>
	(n = 206) %	(n = 62) %	(n = 105) %	(n = 206) %	(n = 62) %	(n = 105) %
Ask/Inform recent school event	39	53*	32	23*	39	39
Ask/Discuss routine activities	45	40	49	21*	29	34
Clarify information from child	5	5	3	12	19	14
Clarify written information	4	3	3	8	19*	9
Discuss recent conference	29	27	5*	16**	5	2
Schedule a meeting at school	24**	16	6	33***	16*	7
Schedule a home visit	45***	2	1	--	--	--

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

Teachers were more likely than parents to initiate communication for the purpose of describing routine daily activities or sharing information about a special event. Teachers at Preschool and Child Care programs more often had discussion about children's health ($\chi^2 = 11.707$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). Teachers at the ECSE programs had communication with parents most often for children's progress at home ($\chi^2 = 15.740$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$) and to schedule a meeting ($\chi^2 = 15.872$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$) or home visit ($\chi^2 = 93.852$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

Parental Preferences for Communication

Although the majority of parents in each group reported satisfaction with the form and frequency of communication with teachers over the past 4 weeks, there were significant differences among the groups on how satisfied they were and what forms of communication

they would prefer to use for exchanging information with teachers.

Over 81% of the parents with children in the ECSE programs reported satisfaction with the form and type of communication they had received from their children's teachers ($\chi^2 = 14.493$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). Approximately 30% of the parents preschool and child care programs indicated they would prefer more information than they had received from teachers. Over 80% of the parents in the preschool and child care programs reported a preference for face-to-face contact with teachers. The parents associated with the ECSE programs were significantly more likely than the other parents to prefer the use of printed forms of communication (35%) or telephone contacts (21%) ($\chi^2 = 80.421$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

As preschool children with disabilities transition between segregated early intervention and community-based early childhood education programs, parents are often challenged to learn the practices at each program for communicating with teachers. Results of this study highlight differences in family demographics that may contribute to the differences noted in communication practices at each type of program. The design and purpose of each type of early childhood program may be responsible for the differences observed in the form and focus of parent-teacher communication. These differences could present challenges for parents and staff as young children with disabilities begin enrollment in new early childhood programs or dual enrollment in different type of programs.

Demographics

One-third of the parents in the ECSE group reported having their children dually enrolled in ECSE and a community-based program. These parents may be single or dual-income workers, requiring child care for the portion of the day the children were not attending the ECSE program. The dual enrollments mean twice the number of teachers for parents to communicate with on a regular basis. In addition, the high percentage of parents with children enrolled in the ECSE programs reporting two or more children in their families may mean two or more child care, preschool or elementary school teachers for these parents to communicate with on a regular basis. If the single parents were also the ones

who had more than one child to raise, worked full-time, utilized supplemental preschool or child care programs, the challenges for communicating regularly with ECSE and preschool or child care teachers would be particularly difficult.

Form/Frequency

Over one-half of the parents in the ECSE group reported using the written journal daily or weekly compared to only one-third who reported daily or weekly face-to-face communication with the ECSE teachers. The results support previous descriptions of ECSE programs as offering limited face-to-face communication with parents (Hadden & Fowler, 1997; Hains, Rosenkoetter, & Fowler, 1991). The use of written materials by parents and teachers may be a compensation for the lack of face-to-face contact.

Formal notes/memos and newsletters are generally less apt to prompt an immediate response or fail to address individual children's needs than daily journals, and may therefore be less specific to immediate needs of the parents and their children at home or at school. Journals, by design (notebook bound), often permit a dialogue between parents and teachers on established topics over a number of days as parents and teachers respond to each others queries and comments (Runge, Walker & Shea, 1975). In addition, in the absence of a journal or notebook, community-based preschool teachers or child care providers may get limited dialogue with parents of children with disabilities as notes/memos and newsletters fail to prompt regular interactions between parents and teachers. Similarly, since ECSE parents have

been used to receiving and exchanging information with ECSE teachers about their individual children, these parents may expect the same immediate or individualized responses from teachers. The expectations of parents and teachers in community-based early childhood programs need to be discussed and clarified early in the program in order to avoid communication breakdown and ineffectiveness over time.

Initiations

Although teachers were reported to initiate communication with parents more often than parents in all programs, parents affiliated with Preschool and Child Care programs were more likely than parents in ECSE programs to initiate communication with the teachers face-to-face or via a telephone. This assertiveness on the part of parents in these community-based early childhood programs may be a result of the teachers' inability to initiate communication often enough with the larger number of parents enrolled in their programs. Furthermore, the drop-off and pick-up routines available to so many of the parents in these community-based programs may have permitted parent-initiated communication less formally but more frequently. In addition, as parents and teachers in community-based early childhood programs interact informally over time at drop-off and pick-up times they establish a relationship that may permit greater comfort for telephone conversations and messages.

As parents of children with disabilities enroll in inclusive community-based early childhood programs they may expect teacher-initiated communication like had been the pattern in their

segregated early intervention programs. When teachers in preschool and child care programs fail to initiate individual contacts with parents, parents of children with disabilities may interpret this lack of action as disinterest in the family and child. ECSE teachers are encouraged to prompt these discussions between parents and community-based program professionals during transition and orientation meetings.

Focus/Reasons

The majority of parents in each group liked to ask "how's my child doing?" Whereas parents affiliated with preschool or child care programs would more likely share information about their children's health or ask about a special activity at school, the parents in ECSE programs initiated communication with teachers to schedule a meeting (IFSP, IEP, etc.). This parent-initiation of meetings and discussions with teachers suggests a desire for more face-to-face contact with teachers than parents in the ECSE group currently receive. Furthermore, parents associated with preschool and child care programs have an easier, less formal format for mentioning the children's health status. Unless the children's health or special school event were extremely unique, the parents affiliated with ECSE programs would probably not take the time to call, or write teachers about these events.

Although teachers in all three types of programs reportedly described routine and special events for parents, teachers in community-based early childhood programs were more likely than teachers in ECSE programs to initiate communication about the children's health. Teachers in ECSE programs

initiated communication with parents to schedule meetings, home visits, or discussions about recent conferences. It may also reflect a philosophy in ECSE programs for frequent discussions with parents about children's individual needs and progress.

Finally, the ECSE teachers were also more likely to ask about the children's progress at home. This interest on the part of ECSE teachers may reflect their dedication to family-centered practices that emphasizes parent-related issues for raising a child with a disability and a focus on facilitating developmental progress and independence in these children across settings (Bailey, 1994).

Summary

The parent-teacher communication practices in ECSE programs differ in form, frequency and focus from the communication practices reported for community-based early childhood education and care programs. As children with disabilities transition between segregated ECSE and to inclusive community-based programs, teachers and parents will need to discuss their interest and ability to (a) establish regular face-to-face or written dialogues about the children so as to foster partnership; (b) meet regularly to discuss the children's progress and problems; (c) initiate contacts with one another in person or by phone or routine written forms to supply needed information or focus; and (d) provide one another with needed detail regarding the child's health. Early intervention personnel should be active in fostering such discussions between parents and teachers as children with disabilities begin enrollment in community-based programs.

Future research is needed to clarify what role transportation plays in effecting parent-teacher communication practices. The lack of regular face-to-face contacts with teachers may have more specific influences on the form, frequency and focus of parent-teacher interactions than the present data revealed. Finally, the present study reflected the practices of early childhood programs in only one community. In other communities and with a larger number of programs need to be examined.

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Parent-Teacher Communication Practices in Three Types of Early Childhood Programs

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Abstract

As preschool children with disabilities transfer between segregated early intervention programs and inclusive community-based preschools and child care programs, parents are often challenged to learn the expectations and practices at each program for communicating with teachers. This descriptive study was designed to identify the similarities and differences in parent-teacher communication practices at three early childhood programs in one community. A parent report survey was used to investigate the frequency, form and focus of communication between parents and teachers in a recent 4 week period at segregated early childhood special education programs, community-based preschools, and community-based child care centers. Results highlight differences in family demographics that may contribute to differences noted in communication practices at each program. Parents with children enrolled in segregated ECSE programs were more likely to rely on written communication with teachers on a daily or weekly basis to exchange information regarding the individual children's behaviors and progress. Conversely, parents with children enrolled in the community preschool and child care programs reported daily face-to-face contact with teachers, formal newsletters, art products and notices on a weekly basis describing past or upcoming activities for the group of children, and the use of occasional conferences or phone calls to keep them informed of the children's activities and developmental progress. However, more and when young children with disabilities have dual enrollment, the communication from community-based preschools or child care centers may not satisfy parents of children with disabilities. Suggestions for adaptations of communication in community-based preschool and child care center were made.

Key words : P-T communication, early childhood special education