

Research Highlights

Topic: Partnerships

Turnbull, A.P., Turbiville, V., & Turnbull, H.R. (2000). Evolution of family-professional partnership models: Collective empowerment as the model for the early 21st century. In S.J. Meisels & J.P. Shonkoff (Eds.). *Handbook of early intervention* (pp. 630-650). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Bottom Line: This chapter presents four models of parent-professional partnerships from the perspective of power relationships in early intervention services. The parent counseling/psychotherapy model, as well as the parent training/involvement model, both involve a “power-over” relationship in which the professional is in control of the relationship with the parent. By contrast, the family-centered model involves a “power-with” relationship in which families and professionals share power – family choice is honored, and family strengths are recognized in developing and implementing early intervention. The third model, collective empowerment, expands the concepts of family-centered programs to expand the capacity of families, professionals, and the broader community to access resources and make choices. Power is redefined; rather than control, it is conceptualized as capacity building for all participants.

Tips

- Empower families to participate meaningfully in a collective empowerment service model by
 - ◆ providing sufficient information about options to enable parents to make meaningful choices
 - ◆ mobilizing informal resources to participate in a network of support
 - ◆ providing meaningful and equal participation of families and professionals in decision making at all levels.
- Empower professionals to participate meaningfully in a collective empowerment service model by
 - ◆ redefining the role of the professional as a coordinator or facilitator rather than the lone “expert”
 - ◆ expanding the capacity of professionals through mobilizing collaborative partnerships with the team and community
 - ◆ acknowledging professional as well as family needs for appreciation and recognition.

Key Findings

- The predominant model of parent-professional relationships from the 1950’s to 1960’s was the counseling/psychotherapy model, which assumed parental pathology in the discovery of their child’s “deficits,” and which were focused on helping the parent through the “grief cycle” to emerge as accepting of their child’s disabilities

and (if needed) placing him or her outside the home. The professional was the primary decision maker in this model, with control over diagnosis, “treatment,” and decisions about best outcomes for the child and family.

- The parent training/involvement model from the 1960's to 1970's was based on an assumption that the family environment was at least partially the cause of the child's disabilities. Therefore, parents were to be provided with training to improve the child's learning environment. They were viewed as “extra hands” in providing therapy to their child. Further, parents were recruited to extend the child's early intervention program beyond what the therapist could provide. The focus remained on the professional as the primary decision maker, as he or she involved the parent as an aide in providing more intensive interventions to the child based on the choices of the professional.
- Family-centered services were more of a shared power model, focusing on the family as the ultimate decision maker, and emphasizing family strengths. The family’s concerns, priorities, and resources were seen as a guide in selecting goals of intervention as well as resources.
- The collective empowerment model moves beyond “shared power” to develop and enhance the total capacity or power of the family, the professional team, and the community. Power is redefined as access to resources rather than control. The group works together to make creative decisions that best meet the need of child and family.

Related Publications

- Bond, M., & Keys, C. (1993). Empowerment, diversity, and collaboration: Promoting synergy on community boards. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21(1), 37-57.
- Gutierrez, L., & Nurius, P. (Eds.) (1994). *Education and research for empowerment practice* (Monograph No. 7). Seattle, WA: University of Washington, School of Social Work, Center for Policy and Practice Research.
- Saleebey, D. (1996). *The strengths perspective in social work practice: Extensions and cautions*. New York: Longman.
- Skrtic, T. M. (1991). *Behind special education: A critical analysis of professional culture and school organization*. Denver, CO: Love.

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