Some Thoughts on the Challenges Facing the Early Childhood Special Education Workforce

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What Do ECSE Providers Identify As Top Issue?

Challenging Behavior
Effects of Exposure on a Daily Basis

a) Feeling Inadequate, Angry, Frustrated (Joseph & Strain, 2008)
b) Engaging in Largely Reactive, Punitive and Ineffective Strategies (Joseph & Strain, 2008)
c) Leaving Field (Bruder & Stayton, 2009)
And the Magnitude of the Problem?

a) 97% of providers say behaviors are getting worse, happening at younger age and involving more children (Joseph & Strain, 2008)
b) Across 5 large-scale studies the best estimate is that approximately 20% of children in the general population display significant challenging behavior, and up to 70% of children on IFSPs/IEPs (Strain, Joseph & Hemmeter, 2009).
c) Likely then, every provider deals with significant challenging behavior every year.
Some Good News to Report

a) The field has a solid foundation of evidence-based practices

b) These practices are supplemented by NAEYC practices
c) The field has a solid foundation of practices specific to the prevention of challenging behaviors
The field has fidelity measures to monitor the quality of implementation of evidence-based practices.

- *Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool for Preschool Classrooms* (TPOT) (Hemmeter & Fox, 2008)
So, Why the Continuing Concerns?

1. Except where federal initiatives have been involved (CSEFEL/TACSEI) state and local programs have not developed policies and procedures to promote the use of evidence-based practices (Mincic, Smith & Strain, 2009).

2. Where OSEP dollars are unavailable the probability of preservice curricula incorporating EBPs is about 50%. The probability is raised to 80% where OSEP dollars are involved (Bruder & Stayton, 2009).

4. Few Programs offer the type and level of support (namely “Coaching to Fidelity”) needed by support line staff (National Implementation Research Network, 2009; Strain, Joseph & Hemmeter, 2009).
It’s All About Fidelity of Implementation

- Pyramid Model data – 77% threshold
  (Fox & Hemmeter, 2010)

- LEAP – USA data – 90% threshold
  (Strain & Bovey, 2009)
Fidelity of Implementation, cont.

- Mediator of change is “coaching”
- Coaching Essentials Include:
  - time for coach and client to work together
  - data-driven coaching to establish baseline and monitor progress
  - responsive to client learning style
  - predictable cycle of: show – guided practice – immediate feedback – goal setting
What Happens When EBPs Are Implemented Program-Wide

- Staff are more confident
- Staff turnover is diminished
- Children are not “asked to leave”
- Incidents of challenging behavior are diminished
- Children’s social relationships with peers and adults improve
- Parents are more satisfied with services

(Strain, Joseph & Hemmeter, 2009)
Key Messages

1. “Competent” teachers in incompetent programs yield predictable outcomes.
2. Must combine PD with program-wide improvement and with local-level and state-level policy initiatives that are mutually supportive of EBPs.
3. Must rethink PD in many cases to focus on high-fidelity implementation of EBPs.
4. Must realign preservice curricula, hiring, retention, review and promotion to focus on use of EBPs.

5. Must fix the personnel “pipeline” given a 50% shortage in ECSE teachers (Bruder & Strayton, 2009).
Key Messages, cont.

6. Must institute numerous changes in pre-service, including:

   a) Aligning curricula with DEC, CEC, NAEYC standards,

   b) Requiring appropriate age-level field work,

   c) Involving families and other consumers in IHE policy making and delivery,

   d) Graduating students based upon their observed delivery of EBPs
7. We’ve had a multiple decade experiment with individual states designing standards – and it hasn’t worked (Bruder & Strayton, 2009)


National Implementation Research Network (2009). From research to national implementation. Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.
