

Best Practices in Early Intervention with Young Children and Their Families

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Purpose of Presentation

- Describe several kinds of practices that are now considered best or good practices in early childhood intervention with young children with disabilities and their families
- The particular practices I have chosen are ones consistent with the bio-psycho-social model of intervention described in the 2009 Report of the National Reference Group on Multidisciplinary Disability Services for Children
- The main focus of the practices are **active** child and parent **participation** in everyday activities that have capacity-building characteristics and consequences

A Word About Terminology

Different terms are often used to describe best or good practices in early childhood intervention. These include:

- Recommended practices
- Promising practices
- Evidence-based practices
- Research-informed practices
- Scientifically based practices

Best or good practices include these as well as other kinds of practices informed by theory, research, and research informed approaches to intervention.

Two Contrasting Approaches to Early Childhood Intervention

Capacity-Building Practices

vs.

Capacity-Impeding Practices

Capacity-Building Early Childhood Intervention Practices

- Active child participation in everyday real-life activities that provide opportunities for learning context-specific functional and meaningful skills
- Active parent participation in real-life parenting experiences and activities that support and strengthen parenting confidence and competence necessary to carry out parenting responsibilities and provide children development-enhancing learning experiences

Everyday Learning in Home Environments

Creating Learning Environments for Children Under Two

Helen Lynch, PhD Candidate, Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy Dept., UCC Dr. Noirin Hayes,
PhD supervisor, Dublin Institute of Technology IFDCO Conference, UCC, July 2009

Participation in Everyday Activities and Quality of Life in Pre-teenage Children Living with Cerebral Palsy in South West Ireland

Vicki McManus, University College Cork
Paul Corcoran, University College Cork
Ivan J. Perry, University College Cork

BMC Pediatrics 2008, 8:50 doi: 10.1186/1471-2431-8-50

Overall participation in everyday activities was significantly associated with quality of life in 3 of the 10 domains (Physical well-being, Social support and peers & Moods and emotions) in analysis adjusted for gender, age and level of impairment

Definition of Early Intervention

Early intervention includes the experiences and opportunities afforded infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays by the children's parents or other primary caregivers that are intended to promote the children's acquisition and use of behavioral competencies shaping and influencing their prosocial interactions with people and objects in the contexts of everyday activities

Three Guiding Principles

- Child-Focused Principle
- Parent-Focused Principle
- Practitioner-Focused Principle

Principle 1

The experiences and opportunities afforded infants and toddlers with disabilities or delays should strengthen children's self-initiated and self-directed learning and development promoting acquisition of functional behavioral competencies and children's recognition of their abilities to produce desired and expected effects and consequences with people, objects and other aspects of their social and nonsocial environment

Principle 2

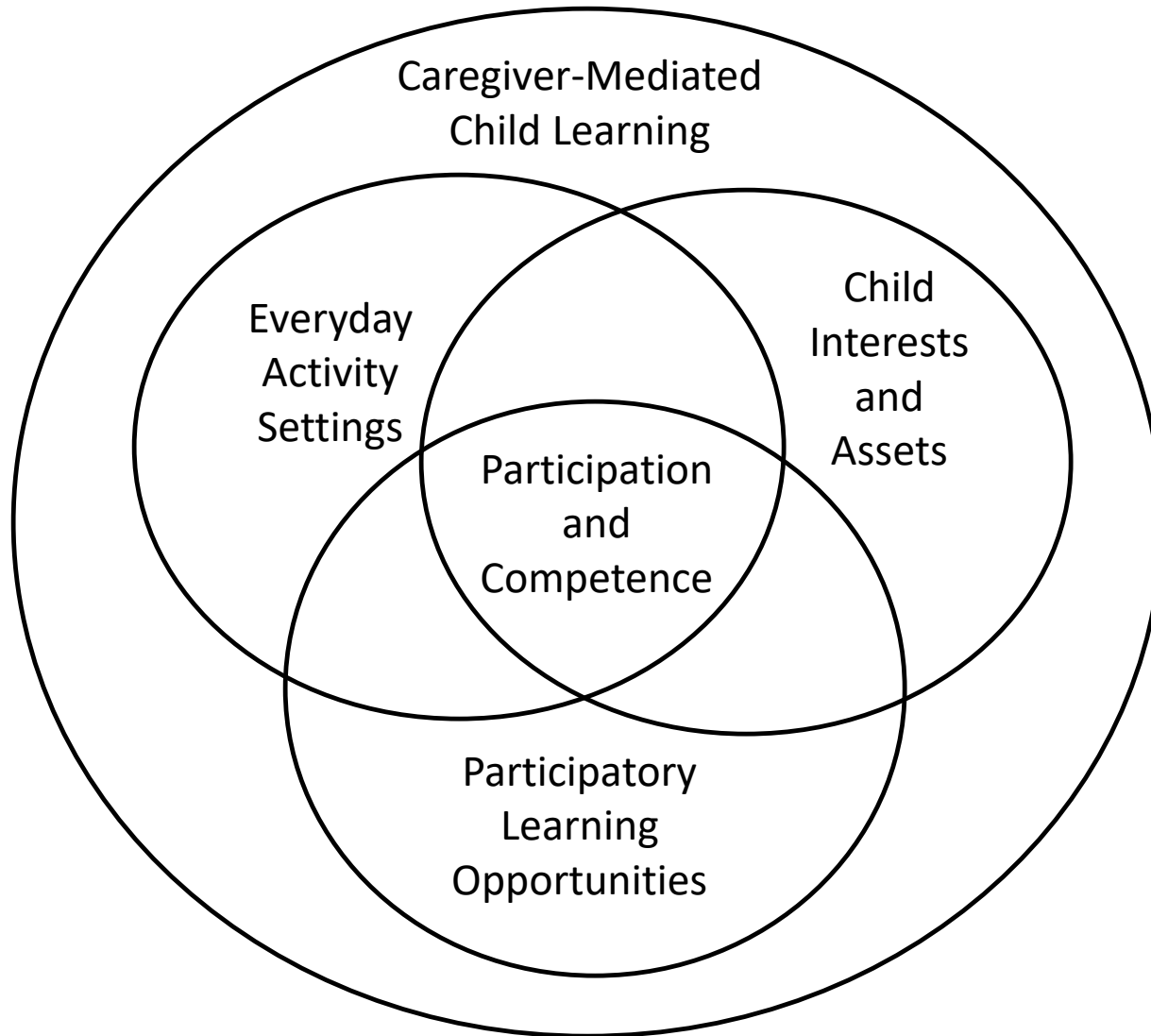
Parent-mediated child learning is the primary means for strengthening context-specific child capabilities and is considered effective to the extent that it strengthens a parent's confidence and competence in providing his or her children development-instigating and development-enhancing learning experiences and opportunities

Principle 3

The role of early intervention practitioners in parent-mediated child learning is to support and strengthen parent capacity to provide their children experiences and opportunities of known qualities and characteristics (i.e., evidence-based) that are most likely to support and strengthen both parent and child competence and confidence

Participatory Early Childhood Intervention Practices

- Everyday Child Learning Activities
- Participatory Child Learning Opportunities
- Interest-Based Child Learning
- Parenting Interactional Behavior
- Practitioner Help Giving Practices



Contextually-Mediated Early Childhood
Intervention Practices Model

Everyday Child Learning Opportunities

- ***Everyday family and community activities*** are the experiences, events, routines, situations and so forth that provide children learning opportunities have development-enhancing (or development impeding) characteristics and consequences.
- ***Natural learning environments*** are the everyday activities providing children learning experiences and opportunities promoting and strengthening child competence and development.
- ***Participation in everyday activities*** provides a child opportunities to engage in real-life or situated learning to practice existing abilities, acquire new skills, and learn about the behavioral propensities of the social and nonsocial environment.

Sources of Everyday Child Learning Opportunities

Family Activities (Example)

Community Activities (Example)

Family Routines (Cooking)

Family Excursions (Car/bus rides)

Parenting Routines (Child's bedtime)

Family Outings (Visiting friends/neighbors)

Child Routines (Dressing/undressing)

Play Activities (Playgrounds)

Literacy Activities (Reading child stories)

Community Activities (Library/book mobile)

Play Activities (Lap games)

Outdoor Activities (Nature trail walks)

Physical Play (Rough housing)

Recreation Activities (Swimming)

Entertainment Activities (Dancing/singing)

Children's Attractions (Petting zoos/animal farms)

Family Rituals (Saying grace at meals)

Art/Entertainment Activities (Concerts/theater)

Family Celebrations (Holiday dinners)

Church/Religious Activities (Sunday school)

Socialization Activities (Having friends "over")

Organizations and Groups (Children's clubs)

Gardening Activities (Vegetable garden)

Sports Activities (T-Ball)



















Participatory Child Learning Opportunities

- An important characteristic of learning in general, and everyday child learning in particular, is a child's **recognition** that he or she was the person who produced interesting environmental effects and consequences.
- Interactions with material and people that permit a child to learn the **relationship** between his or her behavior and its consequences are more likely to have **development-enhancing characteristics** and in turn enhance learning and promote child development.













Interest-Based Everyday Child Learning

- One of the most important developing-instigating characteristics of everyday child learning is interest-based participation in everyday activities.
- Findings from three research syntheses of the relationship between children's interests and children's cognitive, social, adaptive, language, and early literacy behavior and development indicated that there are value-added benefits of learning opportunities that have interest-based features and elements.
- Interest-based everyday child learning opportunities can be used as “interventions” for promoting child participation in everyday activities providing the context for acquisition of functional and context-specific child behavioral competencies.

Types of Child Interests

- ***Personal Interests***

Personal interests are the likes, preferences, desires, etc. of a person that influence participation or engagement in different activities, events, or behavior.

- ***Situational Interests***

Situational interests refers to the “interestingness” of people, objects, events, etc. that gain and maintain a person’s attention, and “draw” the person into engagement or participation in activities.



Excitement



Intense Engagement



Engagement in Preferred Activities



Challenging Activities

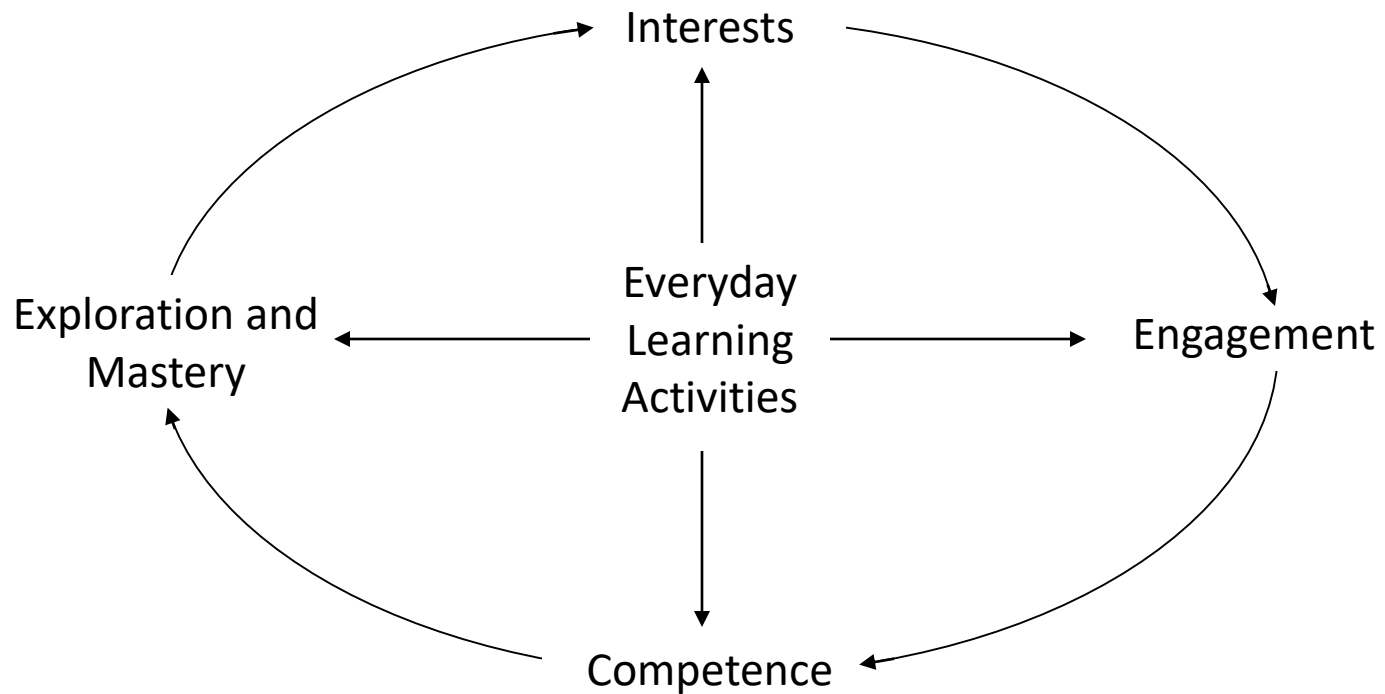


Exploration



Mutually Interesting Activity

Development-Enhancing Everyday Child Learning Opportunities



Role of Parents and Other Caregivers in Everyday Child Learning

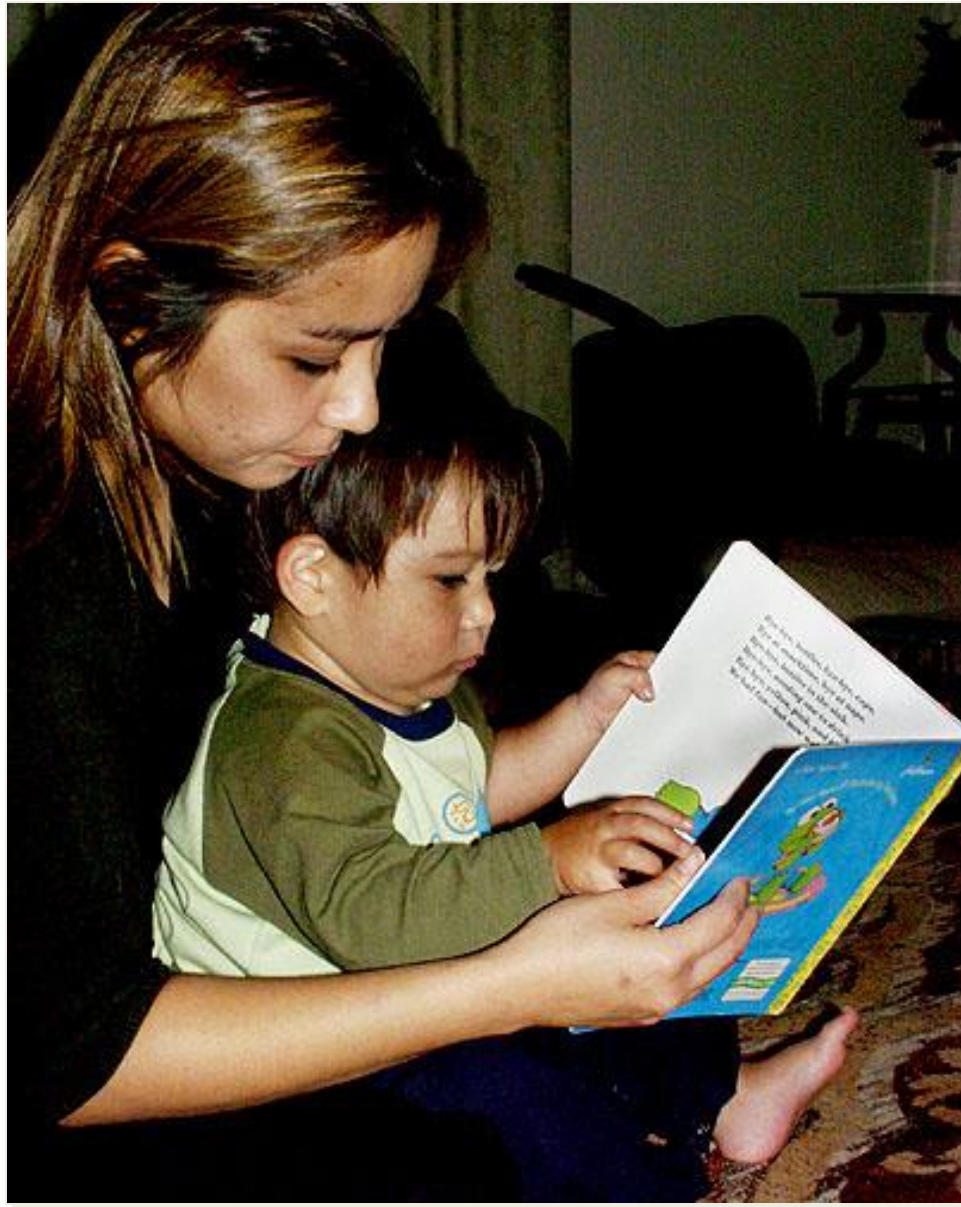
- The ways in which parents and other caregivers **engage**, **encourage**, and **support** child learning in everyday activities matter a great deal if child participation is to have development-enhancing consequences.
- Parenting styles that are **responsive** to child behavior, **encourage** child engagement and exploration, and which are **supportive** of child-initiated behavior are more likely to have optimal child benefits.
- Instructional practices like **responsive teaching** or **incidental teaching** have been effective strategies for promoting child learning in everyday activities.



Parent-Child Lap Games



Trust



Shared Reading



Finger Plays



Cooperative Activity



Child Engagement

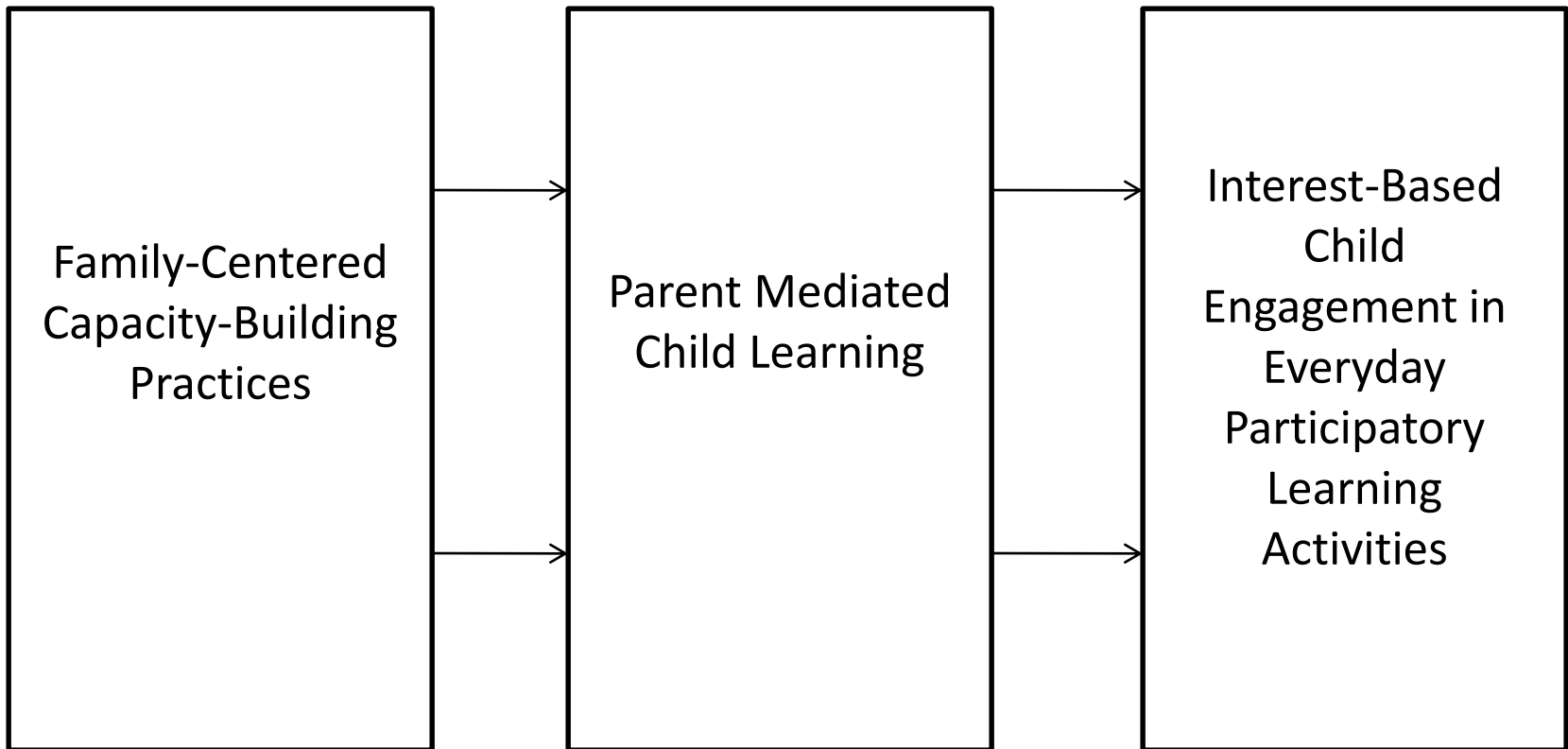


Guided Support

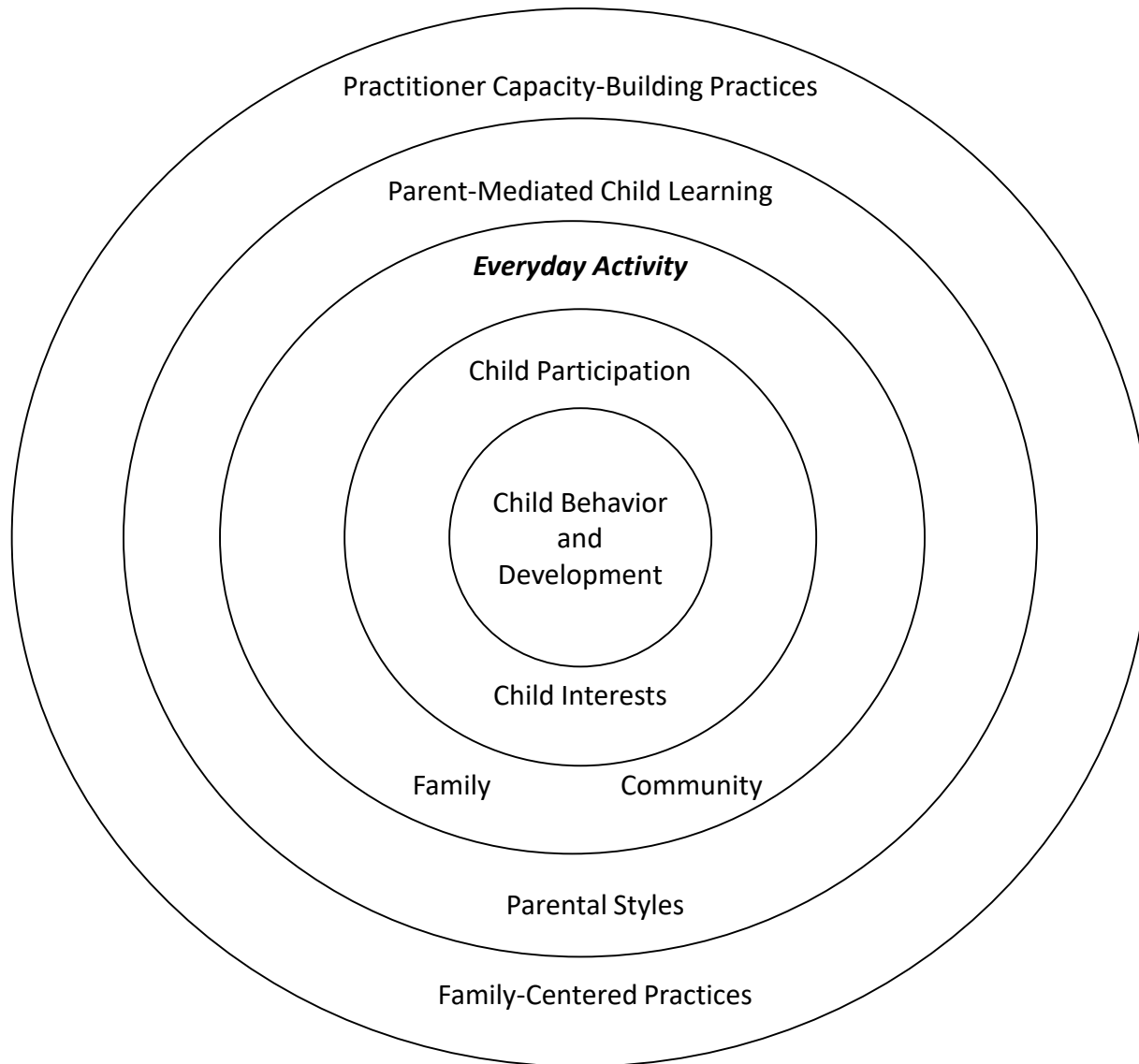


Nursery Rhymes

Relationship Between the Three Intervention Principles



Embedded Relationships Among the Key Features of Parent-Mediated Everyday Child Learning



Capacity-Building Family-Centered Practices

Family-centered helpgiving are practices that treat families with dignity and respect; provide family members with information needed to make informed decisions and choices; involve active family involvement in obtaining resources and supports; and involve practitioner responsiveness and flexibility to family requests and desires

What are Capacity-Building Family-Centered Practices?

Capacity-building family-centered practices are **how** professionals interact with and treat families, and **how** they support existing family member capabilities and promote the development of new competencies.

Relationship Between Family-Centered Practices and Capacity-Building Helpgiving Practices

Family-centered practices are a special case of capacity-building helpgiving practices where the emphasis is on both strengthening and promoting family member confidence and competence, including parents' provision of development-enhancing child learning opportunities.

Practitioner Help Giving Practices

- Relational practices include behaviors typically associated with effective helpgiving (active listening, compassion, empathy, etc.) and positive staff attributions about program participant capabilities. These kinds of practices are typically described in terms of behaviors that strengthen program participant/staff interpersonal relationships (mutual trust, collaboration, etc.).
- Participatory practices include behaviors that involve program participant choice and decision making, and which meaningfully involve participants in actively procuring or obtaining desired resources or supports or achieving desired life goals. These kinds of practices strengthen existing competencies and provide opportunities for learning new capabilities.

Conclusions

- The five practices I described taken together include the kinds of interventions that are likely to promote active child participation in everyday activity strengthening child competence and confidence
- If the goal of early childhood intervention is to support child participation in normative kinds of settings, the five practices can do a nice job of accomplishing that goal
- The practices also are likely to strengthen parenting confidence and competence when child participation is beneficial to a child