Adult Learning Procedure for Promoting Caregiver Use of Everyday Child Language Learning Practices

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This paper includes a description of the approach to professional development used by Center on Everyday Child Language Learning (CECLL) staff to enhance early childhood intervention practitioners’ abilities to promote parents’ adoption and use of interest-based everyday child language learning intervention practices. The approach, called the Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS), is used to promote practitioners’ and parents’ active participation in learning experiences that enhance their knowledge, understanding, and use of CECLL practices. Caregiver-mediated everyday language learning practices performance checklists are used as standards against which practitioners assess and improve their own practices for using PALS. Practitioners, in turn, use PALS and performance checklists with parents to promote their adoption and use of CECLL practices (Dunst, Trivette, & Raab, 2013a, 2013b).

Center on Everyday Child Language Learning Model

The CECLL model for everyday child language learning is shown in Figure 1. The model includes four components: (1) child interest-based language learning opportunities, (2) everyday activities that are used as the contexts for interest-based child language learning, (3) methods and procedures for increasing child participation in everyday language learning activities, and (4) caregiver responsive teaching for supporting and encouraging child language learning in the context of everyday activities. The reader is referred to Dunst et al. (2013a, 2013b) for a more detailed description of the CECLL model and the four complementary practices of the model.

Each of the four components of the CECLL model is based on research evidence demonstrating an empirical relationship between the purposes and goals of activities in each component of the model and the intended outcomes of the activities. This includes the relationships between the characteristics of a responsive interactional style and child language acquisition (Raab, Dunst, Johnson, & Hamby, 2013), the relationships between child personal and situational interests and child language development (Raab, Dunst, & Hamby, 2013), and the relationships between child personal and situational interests and child language development (Raab, Dunst, & Hamby, 2013).
Implementation Science and PALS

PALS is a particular type of professional development practice that is used to promote use of the CECLL intervention practices by practitioners and parents. The professional development practice is an adult learning procedure used to promote the use of CECLL intervention practices to influence child learning and development and, in the process, support and strengthen practitioners’ and parents’ confidence and competence in using the intervention practices.

The distinction between professional development practices and practices used to affect changes in child learning and development is a central feature of implementation science (Dunst, 2012). Fixen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, and Wallace (2005), in their review and analysis of the state of implementation science research, differentiated between evidence-based implementation and intervention practices and the outcomes of the practices. Implementation practices are the methods, procedures, or activities used to promote adoption and use of intervention practices, and intervention practices are the methods, procedures, or activities used to promote improvements or changes in outcomes of interest. Accordingly, implementation practices are defined as the methods and procedures used by implementation agents (coaches, home visitors, etc.) to promote end-users’ (e.g., parents) adoption and use of evidence-based intervention practices, whereas intervention practices are defined as the methods and procedures used by intervention agents (e.g., parents) to influence changes or produce desired outcomes in intended recipients (e.g., infants, toddlers, and preschoolers).

Figure 2 shows the relationships between PALS (an implementation practice), the CECLL practices (intervention practices), and practitioner, parent, and child outcomes. PALS is used by practitioners to promote parents’ use of the CECLL intervention practices to promote child language learning where positive benefits are expected to be realized in terms of practitioner confidence and competence, parent competence and confidence, and child language acquisition and a sense of mastery associated with improved language competence.

Research Foundations of the Participatory Adult Learning Strategy

PALS is based on the findings from a meta-analysis of four different adult learning methods (Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2010) and the characteristics of practices of the different adult learning methods that were associated with positive learner outcomes. Fifty-eight studies of the four adult learning methods were the focus of analysis: accelerated learning (Meier, 2000), coaching (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990), guided design (Wales & Stager, 1982), and just-in-time training (Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003).

The studies were coded in terms of six different characteristics of adult learning based on the findings of the National Research Council’s synthesis of research on human learning (Bransford et al., 2000; Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino, 1999). The characteristics included: (1) introducing new material, knowledge, or practices to a learner; (2) demonstrating or illustrating the use of the material, knowledge, or practice for a learner; (3) engaging the learner in the use of the material, knowledge, or practice; (4) having the learner evaluate
the outcomes of the use of the knowledge or practice; (5) having the learner reflect on his or her learning experience; and (6) engaging the learner in self-assessment of mastery of knowledge and skills as the basis for identifying new learning experiences.

The synthesis findings indicated that particular practices for each of six adult learning characteristics were associated with positive learner outcomes, and the more actively learners were involved in mastering the use of new practices, the more positive were the outcomes (Dunst et al., 2010). More specifically, thirteen different practices had moderate to large effects on learner outcomes. The practices for each adult learning characteristic that were associated with positive learner outcomes are shown in Table 1. Further analysis showed that optimal learner benefits were realized when a combination of 4 or 5 practices listed in Table 1 were used with fewer than 20 participants in real-life applied settings and the instruction or training lasted more than 20 hours and was conducted on multiple occasions (Dunst & Trivette, 2012).

**Use of PALS**

Different versions of *PALS* have been used to promote practitioners’ abilities to use family-systems intervention practices (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988), capacity-building help giving practices (Trivette & Dunst, 2007), early childhood intervention practices (Raab, Dunst, Wilson, & Parkey, 2009), natural learning environment practices (Dunst et al., 2001), and preschool classroom practices (Wilson & Raab, 1997). The research foundations for *PALS* include, in addition to the sources of evidence described above, studies of two outreach training projects that demonstrated the benefits of participatory professional development practices. One project promoted use of a family-systems approach to early childhood intervention (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 2011), and the other promoted use of evidence-based early childhood classroom practices (Dunst & Raab, 2010; Raab & Dunst, 1997). In both studies, early childhood practitioners were provided either intensive, repeated on-site training that emphasized practitioners’ active involvement in implementing the targeted practices, or less frequent and less intensive training (Dunst & Raab, 1999; Trivette & Dunst, 2000). Practitioners in the intensive, on-site training programs outperformed their counterparts on almost every outcome measure.

The manner in which *PALS* had direct and indirect effects on practitioners’ use of evidence-based classroom practices, and in turn influenced child behavior and learning, was recently the focus of investigation in 18 Head Start classrooms (Trivette, Raab, & Dunst, 2012a, 2012b). A *PALS*

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### Table 1

**Cohen’s d Effect Sizes for Different Adult Learning Method Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Method Characteristics/Practices</th>
<th>Number Studies</th>
<th>Mean Effect Size</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Z-test</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-class learner activities/self instruction</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.52 - .77</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom/workshop presentations</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.53 - .72</td>
<td>13.14</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-class learner exercises</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.38 - .71</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illustration/Demonstration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role playing/simulations</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.42 - .68</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner informed input</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.34 - .72</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practicing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real life application</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.79 - 1.09</td>
<td>12.15</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real life application + role playing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.61 - 1.03</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving tasks</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.39 - .58</td>
<td>10.10</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess strengths/weaknesses</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.65 - 1.22</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review experience/make changes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.38 - .56</td>
<td>10.19</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance improvement reviews</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.89 - 1.65</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling/behavioral suggestions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.52 - 1.12</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mastery</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards-based self assessment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.72 - .99</td>
<td>12.47</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2013 / Number 3
Appendix A

Mastering the Use of Intervention Practice

For promoting active learner involvement in a participatory adult learning strategy, introducing the use of an intervention practice is accomplished by illustrating the key characteristics of PALS and to self-assess his or her learning experiences and to determine “next steps” in the learning process.

**PALS Coaching Model**

The PALS coaching model (Dunst & Trivette, 2009) is shown in Figure 3. The four phases of the adult learning method included: introduction, application, informed understanding, and repeated learning opportunities. Appendix A includes a checklist of the six key elements of PALS used as standards for assessing the fidelity of use of the adult learning procedure. The checklist is used by a coach or trainer in collaboration with a learner (e.g., early childhood practitioner) to illustrate the key characteristics of PALS and to self-assess his or her learning experiences and to determine “next steps” in the learning process.

**Introduction**

The first phase of PALS includes the methods and procedures for introducing a practice and illustrating how the practice is used. Introducing a practice is accomplished by describing the key characteristics of an intervention practice and providing additional information about the practice (e.g., the foundations of and rationale for the practice) to increase a learner’s knowledge and understanding of the practice. Illustrating the use of an intervention practice is accomplished by providing specific examples of the practice, showing a video of how the practice is used, or demonstrating the use of the practice for the learner.

**Application**

The second phase of PALS actively engages the learner in practicing and evaluating his or her use of an intervention practice. This involves the learner’s engagement in activities that facilitate his or her use of the practice together with coach guidance and feedback. These kinds of opportunities include role-playing, having the learner demonstrate his or her use of the intervention practice, and coach support and feedback on a learner’s use of the intervention practice. Evaluation involves a coach and learner jointly examining the manner in which the learner’s use of the intervention practice was consistent or inconsistent with the key characteristics of the practice and why, and whether or not the practice had expected benefits.

**Informed Understanding**

This phase of PALS involves the learner’s reflection on his or her overall understanding and self-assessment of his or her overall mastery of knowledge and skills related to the intervention practice as specified on a performance checklist. The learner uses the checklist as the basis for reflection on the extent to which he or she understands and has mastered the use of the intervention practice. Learner understanding is facilitated by a coach engaging the learner in self-assessment of mastery of a practice by using performance checklists to ascertain overall mastery of all of the key characteristics of a practice. Guidance and feedback are also used to assist the learner in identifying the kinds of changes that he or she could make in order to improve the use of the intervention practice.

**Repeated Learning Opportunities**

The Repeated Learning Opportunities phase of PALS involves coach-learner joint planning to identify the next steps in the learning process. Learners use their self-assessment of mastery of an intervention practice to identify the kinds of experiences that are needed in order to better understand and use the practice in a manner consistent with the practice standards. New information and experiences build on the learner’s understanding or skills related to a practice or to help the learner relate knowledge and skills about a practice to the characteristics of another CECLL practice. The PALS process is repeated as many times as necessary to develop the learner’s knowledge and skills and deep understanding of the practice.

**Framework for Using PALS**

Figure 4 shows a matrix of the four PALS phases and the four CECLL intervention model components. The matrix is a framework for using PALS to identify participatory experiences to promote learner understanding and use of practices related to each model component. The PALS pro-
cess is used with each CECLL intervention model component (child interests, language-rich everyday activities, increased child language learning opportunities, responsive teaching) to identify opportunities for learning the key characteristics of the everyday language intervention practices as specified on performance checklists. Intervention practice checklist indicators are used by practitioners with parents to promote children’s everyday language learning (Dunst, Trivette et al., 2013a, 2013b).

Appendix B includes the Everyday Child Learning Activity Checklist to provide the reader an example of this type of performance checklist. CECLL staff use the PALS process to involve early intervention practitioners in learning each of the CECLL practices, where practitioners, in turn, use PALS to promote parents’ understanding and use of CECLL practices for each model component. The reader is referred to Dunst et al. (2013b) for the checklists for the other components of the everyday language learning practices.

**Illustrative Example**

The following example illustrates the use of PALS by CECLL staff with practitioners learning to use the Everyday Child Learning Activities component of the CECLL intervention model. The practices in this component of the model include the identification and selection of family and community activities that provide a child interest-based everyday language learning opportunities.

**Introduction**

Practitioners are provided information about the benefits of everyday child language learning and the types of everyday activities that “make up” children’s family and community lives. The Everyday Learning Activity Checklist is used to describe the key characteristics of practices and for identifying everyday activities best suited for children’s language learning (e.g., interest-based, frequently-occurring, rich in language learning opportunities).

The types and variety of children’s everyday activities are illustrated using descriptive, video, or in vivo examples. Practitioners are provided multiple examples of the different kinds of everyday activities that occur in children’s lives and how they provide children language learning opportunities. Video tapes of children participating in different family and community activities and the language learning opportunities that occur in those activities are used to illustrate everyday child language learning. CECLL staff also demonstrate how practitioners can introduce and illustrate ways that parents can identify and select interest-based everyday activities as contexts for their children’s language learning.

**Application**

CECLL staff actively engage practitioners in experiences that provide them opportunities to learn to select interest-based everyday language learning activities and to help parents identify and select learning activities for their children. For example, practitioners are provided opportunities to view video tapes showing children in a variety of activities, and then are asked to identify the different language learning opportunities in those activities and to choose the activities that provide the richest language learning opportunities. They can also observe a child to learn about the child’s interests and everyday activities and use that information to identify and select activities that are interest-based for the child.

Practitioners also are engaged in role-plays where the Everyday Learning Activity Checklist is used to practice how to assist parents to identify and select everyday learning activities of their child. Practitioners then use the practices in their interactions with parents to help them identify the everyday activities that will be used as contexts for their children’s language learning. CECLL staff also engage practitioners in examining each of the checklist indicators to determine the extent to which they were able to promote parents’ understanding and use of the different practices, whether their practice was consistent or inconsistent with the indicators, and what they might do to improve their use of the practices.

**Informed Understanding**

CECLL staff engage practitioners in self-assessment of the extent to which they are able to promote parents’ understanding of everyday learning activities and parents’ abilities to use interest-based activities as contexts for child learning. Performance checklists that include the key characteristics of a targeted practice are used to facilitate practitioners’ deeper understanding of the practice. Practitioners are asked to use a checklist to reflect on how they helped parents identify the everyday activities that make up their family and community lives and the kinds of interest-based child language learning opportunities the activities provide.

**Repeated Learning Opportunities**

CECLL staff and a practitioner jointly use the practitioner’s self-assessment of their experiences to identify additional learning opportunities to build upon the practitioners’

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**Figure 4.** Matrix illustrating the use of the PALS process to identify participatory learning opportunities for each CECLL model component.
abilities to help parents identify interest-based child learning activities. New opportunities might involve obtaining additional information or identifying experiences that promote the practitioner’s abilities to help parents expand their understanding and use of everyday activities as contexts for child learning or help parents decide whether to continue, discontinue, or modify the selected activities, or identify new activities. Opportunities for learning about other components of the CECLL model might also be identified during this phase. The PALS procedure occurs repeatedly within and across the different CECLL model components.

Summary

The adult learning process described in this paper is used by Center on Everyday Child Language Learning staff to promote practitioners’ understanding of caregiver-mediated language learning and to improve their ability to promote parents’ use of the CECLL child language learning intervention model practices. Several features of the PALS adult learning procedure warrant special emphasis:

1. Practitioners and parents are actively engaged in all phases of the PALS process as the primary means for learning to use the CECLL intervention practices. Actively involving practitioners and parents learning the CECLL intervention practices is seen as necessary for supporting and strengthening their confidence and competence (Bruder, Dunst, Mogro-Wilson, & Stanton, in press).

2. All phases of the PALS process are used with reference to the everyday language intervention practice checklists (Dunst, Trivette et al., 2013b). Throughout the learning process, practitioners use the practice standards to intervene, reflect on, and modify or change their use of the CECLL practices to make them more consistent with the standards.

3. The CECLL adult learning process is a nonlinear and highly individualized process. There is an ongoing effort to support learning and promote deeper understanding based on observations of a learner’s abilities and on learners’ self-assessment of their knowledge and use of the practices.

In summary, CECLL staff use PALS to introduce the CECLL everyday language learning practices to practitioners, illustrate how the practices are used, engage practitioners in using the practices and self-assessing their use against practice standards, and plan new learning opportunities jointly with practitioners. In the same manner, practitioners use PALS and the CECLL language learning practice standards with parents to prompt their use of the CECLL practices. The outcome is continued improvement in both practitioner and parent understanding and use of CECLL child language learning intervention practices.

References


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Appendix A

Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS) Checklist

This checklist includes a process that early intervention practitioners use to promote parents’ use of interest-based everyday child language learning activities. Practitioners use the checklist to be sure all the steps of the adult learning process promote parents’ and other caregivers’ confidence in using interest-based everyday learning practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Were you able to do each of the following during your time together with the parent or other caregiver?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Introduce</strong> information about the model component or practice and its important features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provide examples, demonstrate, or otherwise <strong>illustrate</strong> for the parent what the practice looks like</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Involve the parent in actively trying out and <strong>doing</strong> the practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Assist the parent in <strong>examining</strong> what was done, what happened, and what worked when the practice was implemented</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Determine what the parent <strong>understood</strong> and the extent to which the parent was able to <strong>use</strong> the practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Determine what <strong>additional</strong> opportunities will be provided to build upon the parents’ understanding and use of the practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

*Everyday Child Learning Activity Checklist*

This checklist includes questions practitioners use to help a parent identify and select everyday family and community learning activities that would provide a child interest-based language learning opportunities. The checklist includes indicators for ensuring the most appropriate everyday activities are selected as sources of language learning opportunities. Following interactions with a parent, practitioners complete the checklist by indicating if they did *(Yes)* or did not *(No)* have the opportunity to help the parent use the practices.

### Did you help the parent…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify the family and community activities that are the child’s everyday life experiences?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify those family activities that do or could provide the child interest-based language learning opportunities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identify those community activities that do or could provide the child interest-based language learning opportunities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Select interest-based family and community activities that provide many different kinds of interest-based language learning opportunities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Select interest-based family and community language learning activities that do or could happen often?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Select interest-based family and community learning activities where each activity provides many different language learning opportunities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Select interest-based family and community learning activities that are especially likely to help the child practice emerging language abilities and develop new ones?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Select interest-based family and community activities that allow the child to try to use language in different ways?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>