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Observing Self-Regulation In The Context Of Parent-Child Interactions

By Holly Harrison

Observing interactions between caregivers and their children during play sequences can provide clues to understanding the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of a child’s ability to regulate his or her emotions and behaviors. It also provides a way to start thinking about strategies that caregivers (parents) can use to support their child’s regulation. Although observing a child while interacting with their caregiver can provide meaningful insights and information, it can be challenging.

Observing interactions may feel intimidating to parents so it is important to emphasize that the purpose is not to make judgments about the caregiver, but rather to learn more about the child within the context of their relationship. Observing interactions can help us begin to make causal connections between the caregiver’s identified concerns, the caregiver’s and child’s differences in temperament and interaction styles, and the child’s behavior in natural settings.

Our field has embraced the concept that children grow and flourish in the context of close, dependable relationships that provide love, nurturance and security, which is reflected in responsive and sensitive interactions. Caregivers’ expectations, perceptions and concerns can be seen as a reflection of their relationship with their children. But what do we mean when we talk about responsive and sensitive care giving and what should we look for when observing interactions?

In general, caregiver’s responsive and sensitive behavior involves responding to the baby’s moods (happy, sad, distressed), interpreting the baby’s needs (comfort, stimula-

tion, or nourishment), mimicking the baby’s sounds, following the toddlers lead in play, and stopping when the child has had enough and needs a break. We look for how attuned the caregiver is to the child’s signals at any given moment.

In addition, caregivers often need to interpret or mediate for their child in a variety of social situations and their ability to do so successfully is dependent on the quality of their interactions with their child. Obviously, parents who demonstrate warmth, well-timed contingent responses, acceptance, limit setting, the ability



to share the lead, and are facilitative in their interactions are more likely to help their child regulate his/her behavior and emotions as well as develop and grow.

The caregiver’s style of interaction, directive or facilitative can affect the child’s attentional, social, behavioral, emotional and communicative skills. Caregivers with directive styles frequently demand or command their child to act or behave without providing adequate reinforcement of appropriate behavior. This results eventually in the child not learning to internalize self-control and can lead to inattentiveness, behavior problems, and poor com-

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munication skills. In contrast, caregivers with facilitative styles put much less stress on their children by engaging them in conversation, which enhances their social and attentional skills and reinforces their internal self-regulatory behaviors. Some things to notice while observing a caregiver's style of interaction begin with looking at the overall quality of interaction including the synchrony between the caregiver and child. In addition, notice who initiates, controls, leads and follows during the interaction. Finally, take note of both the caregiver's and the child's response to cues, behaviors, and requests.

The 3-Step Caregiver-Child Interaction Chart below provides a framework for gathering and organizing information to determine where, when and how to intervene. Step 1: Emotional Availability serves as the foundation for the interaction. Both the caregiver and child need to be open, willing and primed to enter into and engage in communicating and relating. Observing the interaction during this step involves monitoring the emotional availability (positive affect, interest, pleasure and connectiveness) of both the caregiver and the child. Step 2: Interaction Strategies focus on the specific interaction behaviors that the caregiver uses to make and keep connections with the child (touches, positions, reads cues, responds, adjusts rhythm). This step also includes noticing the child's reaction to these strategies and his or her reciprocal skills (alerts, responds, engages,

reads cues, imitates). Finally Step 3: Facilitative or Directive Strategies involve tuning in to the caregiver's degree of responsiveness to the child's social and communicative needs, wants and interests (following the child's lead, imitating and expanding, responding positively).

Before beginning an observation, it is important to remind ourselves of the basic underpinnings involved in observing young children especially when focusing on interactions between the caregiver and child. Many of you work with young children on a daily basis and are experienced observers. You understand the difference between what you see (objective observation of behavior) and what you think (subjective interpretation based on information and observations). In addition, you also realize that the significance of the interaction is never based on a single observation but rather repeated patterns of behavior over time. What we sometimes forget to take into account is that our perceptions (both observations and interpretations) are continually shaped and colored by our history, experiences and feelings. Reflective practices are key to learning how our own perceptions, background, culture and other biases influence our observations and conclusions about the intimate nature of the child and caregiver relationship.

Adapted from: *Infant-Toddler Self-Regulation: An Approach for Assessment and Intervention Manual*.

STEP 1 Caregiver & Child's Emotional Availability	STEP 2 Caregiver & Child's Interaction Strategies	STEP 3 Caregiver's Facilitative or Directive Strategies
<p><i>Caregiver's Behaviors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expresses positive affect (<i>facial</i> expression, smiles, laughs, acts expectant) • Creates feelings of interest and pleasure (capture child's interest, initiate interaction) • Maintains connectedness with child 	<p><i>Caregiver's Strategies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touches (maintain or direct engagement) • Positions (for interaction) • Reads child's cues (observing, interpreting, responding) • Follows child's lead (joining in, participating with) • Adjusts rhythm (slows or speeds up to match child) • Responds contingently 	<p><i>Facilitative Strategies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows child to initiate-control interaction • Uses open-ended gestural/verbal behaviors • Uses utterance forms that support interaction (positive response, appropriate to topic, reflective questions, descriptions of activity)
<p><i>Child's Behaviors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shares positive affect (happy expression, response to affective cues) • Expresses eagerness and pleasure • Initiates comfort and physical closeness • Maintains visual gaze 	<p><i>Child Strategies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alerts to sights and sounds • Responds visually • Engages eagerly (initiates interaction) • Reads caregiver's cues accurately • Imitates parent's actions and/or vocalizations 	<p><i>Directive Strategies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiates-controls-structures conversation • Uses closed-ended gestural/verbal behaviors • Identifies multiple response options for child • Uses utterance forms that direct interaction-response (commands, WH or yes/no questions, negative corrective responses)

Announcements

NM Interdisciplinary Early Care and Intervention Conference

The 4th Annual NM Interdisciplinary Early Care and Intervention Conference (NMIECI) will be Friday, November 7, 2008 at the Radisson Hotel Albuquerque. The conference spotlights social and emotional development as the foundation of all learning. In keeping with this theme the keynote speaker will be Neil Boris, MD, a pediatrician, child & adolescent psychiatrist at the Tulane University School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine

The conference will offer ten workshops geared to practitioners and family members involved in early intervention, early care & education, health, and social services.

The day-long, pre-conference, Thursday, November 6th will again explore the importance of reflective practices and supervision in our relationships with families and each other.

Brochure and registration information is now available on our website: www.cdd.unm.edu/ecspd/ieci

E-Learning

Resources on Early Development

By Sandy Heimerl

Early detection of developmental delay is critical. The earlier it's recognized the more we can do to help a child reach her full potential. The Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website has charts for developmental milestones, and fact sheets for developmental screening, autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, vision loss, hearing loss, intellectual disability and ADHD. For more information, access the website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/actearly/>

The Mayo Clinic web site has information on infant development from birth to three months. You can even connect to slide shows on topics such as what a newborn looks like, how to give a bath and car seat safety. Your families might enjoy this informative web site on early development and infant resources.

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/infant-development/PR00061>

Medline Plus, website from the National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health is a reliable and extensive resource on early development:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/infantandtoddlerdevelopment.html>



CDD Online Learning

The Part C Orientation Online Course

This self-paced online learning experience presents an overview of the NM Early Intervention system and the process from Intake to Transition. The course provides a description of the Family Infant Toddler (FIT) program's core values and the 16 services offered to infants and toddlers with or at risk for delays and their families. Certificate & 3 Contact hours are awarded for course completion.

Technology requirements include High Speed Internet, DSL, Cable, and T1 along with Speakers, Adobe Reader and Flash Player.

For Registration Information email: Doreen.Sansom@state.nm.us

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CDD Library Information Network for the Community (LINC)

1-800-827-6380 or 272-0281

Visit the Early Childhood & Specialized Personnel Development Division website at <http://cdd.unm.edu/ecspd/>



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Early Intervention Workshops

Please Post

October 2008

October 9

Family Visiting: A Relationship-Based Approach to Early Intervention

Albuquerque

Bird Podzemny – bpodzemny@salud.unm.edu &
Jen Brown – jenbrown@salud.unm.edu

Service Coordination 2: From Intake to Eligibility

Albuquerque

Sbicca Brodeur – sbicca.brodeur@state.nm.us

October 10

Service Coordination 3: The IFSP Process

Albuquerque

Sbicca Brodeur – sbicca.brodeur@state.nm.us

October 24

Service Coordination 4: Transition

Albuquerque

Sbicca Brodeur – sbicca.brodeur@state.nm.us

October 31

Service Coordination 1

Las Cruces

Sbicca Brodeur – sbicca.brodeur@state.nm.us

November 2008

November 6

Service Coordination 2: From Intake to Eligibility

Las Cruces

Sbicca Brodeur – sbicca.brodeur@state.nm.us

November 7

Service Coordination 3: The IFSP Process

Las Cruces

Sbicca Brodeur – sbicca.brodeur@state.nm.us

November 6 - 7

4th Annual NM Interdisciplinary Early Care & Intervention Conference

Albuquerque

Sheila McKisson – ECNTraining@salud.unm.edu

December 2008

December 4

Developing the Dream: The Individualized Family Service Plan

Albuquerque

Bird Podzemny – bpodzemny@salud.unm.edu

December 5

Service Coordination 4: Transition

Las Cruces

Sbicca Brodeur – sbicca.brodeur@state.nm.us

January 2009

January 16

Service Coordination 1

Roswell

Sheila McKisson – ECNTraining.salud.unm.edu

January 29

Service Coordination 2: From Intake to Eligibility

Roswell

Sheila McKisson – ECNTraining.salud.unm.edu

January 30

Service Coordination 3: IFSP Process

Roswell

Sheila McKisson – ECNTraining.salud.unm.edu

February 2009

February 13

Service Coordination 4: Transition

Roswell

Sheila McKisson – ECNTraining@salud.unm.edu

Please make reservations
for all workshops.

Service Coordination modules are required for all new service coordinators working in early intervention programs. It is highly recommended that these modules be taken in order, if at all possible.

Welcome New ECN Director and Staff



Sophie Bertrand, the new Director, joins the Early Childhood Network not only with sound managerial expertise, but with many years of hands-on experience in providing direct services for children and families in early intervention and preschool settings. Her Masters degree in Multicultural Early Childhood Special Education serves as a foundation for providing vision, guidance and support. She has broad experience in collaborative efforts with state and local agencies and other training and technical assistance providers and has worked to foster partnerships towards an inclusive, strengths-based and collaborative approach to service delivery.



Joe DeBonis is now working with Early Childhood Network as a program consultant. He started with the Preschool Network in March of 2007 after 20 years of service with Alta Mira Specialized Family Services. He is a clinical counselor whose experience includes facilitating parent support groups, coordinating Project Jericho--which supports the inclusion of young children with special needs in early childhood settings--and program manager for the early intervention program at Alta Mira. He has been married for almost 18 years, has two sons, plays guitar, and collects old toys and metal lunchboxes.



Cathy Riley joins the Early Childhood Network as a Training and Development Consultant. She brings years of experience in the field of early childhood education including program management and oversight as well as guidance and training to early childhood staff. Cathy is fluent in Spanish and Keres and has comprehensive knowledge of Native American culture and experience working with diverse populations. Cathy served as an ambassador for the national SpecialQuest program and also brings experience and leadership in innovative program development.

Andy Gomm Chosen for NECTAC Advisory Committee



Andy Gomm, the Family Infant Toddler (FIT) Program manager, was asked to serve on the Advisory Committee for the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. NECTAC receives funding through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to provide training and TA to states and territories in order to

promote quality early intervention and preschool special education services.

The advisory committee included representatives from Zero To Three; Council Exceptional Children – Division of Early Childhood; Alliance for Parent Centers; the ECO Center; National Center for Children in Poverty; a 619 Preschool Special Education director and a higher education representation from the University of North Carolina. At the

recent meeting in Durham, North Carolina the focus was on determining priorities for training and technical assistance for the coming year. In order to help in this task the NECTAC distributed an online survey to states and territories to get feedback regarding the issues and topics that were most pressing. The advisory committee also looked at strategies for the use of technology to provide training and TA and how to increase family centered practices in NECTAC's work.

As a result of this participation at the national level – the NM training and TA team has decided to develop a survey for early intervention staff in order to determine the training and TA priorities for New Mexico. The survey will also get feedback from the field regarding the best methods to deliver training and TA in ways that minimize staff time away from their work, yet meets the need of staff for information and is able to increase their competency. Look out for this survey in the coming months.