Conceptual and Empirical Foundations of Resource-Based Intervention Practices

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ABSTRACT

The conceptual and empirical foundations of resource-based intervention practices are described. Resource-based intervention practices are a set of strategies that focus on mobilization and provision of *resources and supports* to individuals and families to achieve desired outcomes. The practices constitute an alternative to a more traditional service-based approach that focus on services rather than resources for improving human functioning. The conceptual foundations of resource-based intervention practices include formulations from social network theory, ecological psychology, community psychology, and developmental psychology. Findings from a number of studies are briefly presented demonstrating the positive consequences of resource-based intervention practices for individuals, families, and communities.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this *CASEinPoint* is to describe the conceptual and empirical foundations of resource-based intervention practices. Resource-based intervention practices constitute a set of strategies used by early childhood and family support practitioners that focus on the provision and mobilization of *resources* to families of young children to attain desired outcomes. Resource-based intervention practices are based on a paradigm that is an alternative to more traditional service-based approaches to working with children and families.

This paper includes definitions of terms and concepts related to resource-based intervention practices as well as descriptions of the conceptual foundations of resource-based intervention practices. The research foundations of resource-based intervention practices are briefly described, as are studies that demonstrate positive outcomes for children and families when resource-based intervention practices were used. The information provides a basis for further study of the characteristics and consequences of resource-based intervention practices.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

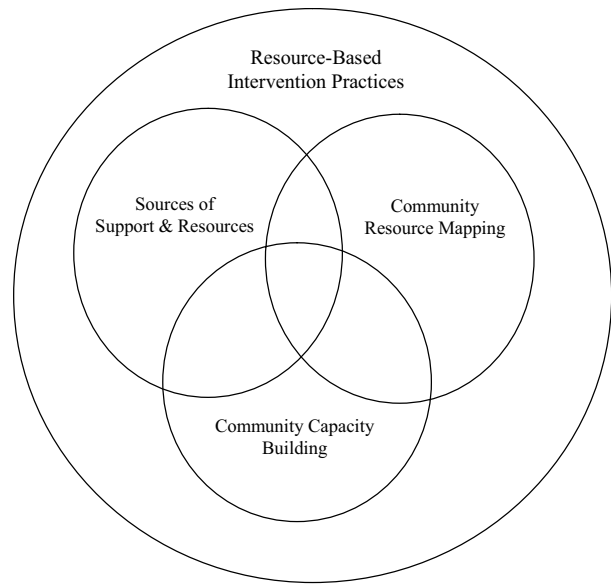In the context of a resource-based intervention practices framework, there are important differences between

the terms services, resources, and sources of support. *Services* are operationally defined as specific or particular activities employed by a professional or agency to assist an individual or group (e.g., occupational therapy or special instruction). *Resources* are operationally defined as the full range of possible types of community help or assistance—potentially useful information, experiences, opportunities, and so forth—that might be mobilized and used to achieve outcomes desired by an individual or group. *Sources of support* are the people, places, or organizations that are repositories of these different kinds of resources.

RESOURCE-BASED MODEL

Dunst and his colleagues (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1994; Trivette, Dunst, & Deal, 1997) developed a resource-based intervention practices model that includes the three components shown in Figure 1. The model includes the sources of support and resources used for both promoting children's learning and development and for strengthening family functioning; community resource mapping strategies to identify both informal and formal resources that children and families might use to achieve desired outcomes; and community capacity-building strategies that directly or indirectly benefit children and families. The model also includes five types of program practices that result in optimal outcomes for children and families: (1) asset-based practices, (2) use of a synergistic paradigm, (3) community-centered practices, (4) use of informal and formal resources, and (5) inside-out solutions. Table 1 includes definitions for each of the five characteristics.

Sources of Support and Resources

Sources of support and resources refer to the full range of possible types of help or assistance, such as potentially useful information, tangible items, emotional and social support, instrumental assistance, experiences, and opportunities that might be used to achieve outcomes desired by an individual, family, or group. Within a resource-based intervention practices framework, practitioners assist families in both identifying and mobilizing a wide range of informal and formal resources and support that are needed and desired by the family to accomplish desired outcomes. Practitioners also assist families in acquiring the skills needed to identify and use resources and supports to accomplish desired outcomes without or with minimal ongoing professional assistance or guidance. The use of informal resources and supports by families includes those that exist within the family's personal social network, as well as those that are available

Figure 1. The three major components of a resource-based intervention practices model.

outside the family, such as community groups, church groups, and friends with whom the family has contact (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1990).

Community Capacity Building

Community capacity building refers to those opportunities or experiences creating or mobilizing resources in neighborhoods or communities that are desired by families with young children in order to promote children's development, enhance parenting confidence and competence, and/or strengthen family functioning. Building community capacity involves identifying and strengthening the abilities of individuals and families, as well as community organizations, to procure resources and supports for children and families. Within a resource-based intervention practices framework, practitioners focus on empowering individuals and families to achieve their goals not just in the present, but in the future. This is accomplished by practitioners using a participatory helpgiving style (Dunst, 2000) which is responsive to individuals' and families' interests and priorities and which facilitates their active participation in achieving their desired outcomes.

Community Resource Mapping

Community resource mapping refers to the procedures used for identifying, gathering information, and identifying the locations of both informal and formal

Table 1

Definitions of Key Resource-Based Intervention Practice Characteristics

Characteristic	Definition	Sources
Asset-based practices	Identifying and building on the strengths of individuals, families, and communities to accomplish desired outcomes. The use of asset-based practices includes increasing abilities and competencies that already exist, as well as recognizing and supporting the potential abilities of individuals, families, and communities.	(Curran, 1983; Dunst, Trivette, & Mott, 1994; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993a;. McKnight, 1987; Otto, 1962, 1975)
Synergistic paradigm	A focus on the inherent ability of individuals, families, and communities to use their own resources to accomplish their desired outcomes in ways that are empowering and are likely to be sustained. The resources used are expandable or renewable in the future.	(Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988; Hobbs et al., 1984; Katz, 1984; Rappaport, Swift, & Hess, 1984)
Community-centered practices	Resources and interventions that are physically located in local communities, build on the resources and supports that exist in local communities, and define solutions primarily in terms of community resources	(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dunst, 2000; Hobbs et al., 1984; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993b; McKnight, 1987; Sarason & Lorentz, 1979; Turner, McKnight, & Kretzman, 1999)
Use of informal and formal resources	Emphasis on the importance of informal resources as crucial to the successful achievement of desired outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Informal resources are viewed as always necessary to supplement formal resources and frequently sufficient to accomplish desired outcomes without formal resources.	(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cochran & Woolever, 1983; Gourash, 1978; Hobbs et al., 1984; Kretzman, McKnight, & Puntunney, 1998; McKnight, 1980, 1987; McKnight & Kretzmann, 1990)
Inside-out solutions	Focus on priorities and concerns of individuals, families, and communities; focus on agendas and outcomes that are consumer-driven; and respect the customs, values, and mores of local communities and groups.	(Dunst & Trivette, 1988; Sarason, Carroll, Maton, Cohen, & Lorentz, 1988; Sarason & Lorentz, 1979; Swift, 1984)

supports and resources that might be mobilized and used to achieve outcomes desired by young children and their families. Community resource mapping is viewed as an ongoing process that is used both on an *a priori* basis to identify potentially useful resources for children and families and to identify specific resources to accomplish individual child or family outcomes as needs arise. Within a resource-based intervention practices framework, practitioners consider any and all resources within the community as potential sources of support for individu-als and families, and they help families choose the resources that best match their interests and priorities to accomplish desired outcomes.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

The conceptual foundations for resource-based intervention practices include Sarason's work on the efficacy of resource exchange networks (Sarason, Carroll, Maton, Cohen, & Lorentz, 1988; Sarason & Lorentz,

1979); Bronfenbrenner's (1979) assertion that person and environmental variables have a strong influence on child and family functioning; Hobbs' (1975) contention that social and community resources should be used to strengthen family functioning; Gourash's (1978) contention that informal network support and the need for professional services are inversely related; Heller's emphasis on the importance of individual choice and decision-making as a determinant of quality of life (Heller, Miller, Hsieh, & Sterns, 2000), and Dunst's integrated framework for early childhood intervention and family support, which emphasizes social systems and environmental variables "that are associated with development-enhancing and family-strengthening consequences" (Dunst, 2000, p. 18).

The resource-based intervention practices paradigm in the fields of early childhood and family support is mirrored by a new paradigm in the field of developmental disabilities that emphasizes resources and supports that promote individuals' full participation in family and community life, and that views development as a consequence of both the characteristics of the individual *and* the characteristics of environments (National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, 2000).

Resource-based intervention practices are also highly consistent with the American Association on Mental Retardation support-oriented definition of mental retardation and the conditions necessary for supporting learning and development (Luckasson et al., 2002; Luckasson et al., 1992). This definition emphasizes the use of natural supports as an "efficient and effective way to maximize habilitation services to individuals with disabilities" (Luckasson et al., 1992, p. 101). Supports are defined as "*resources* and strategies that promote the interests and causes of individuals with or without disabilities; that enable them to access *resources*, information, and relationships inherent within integrated work and living environments; and that result in their enhanced *independence/interdependence, productivity, community integration*, and satisfaction" (Luckasson et al., 1992, p. 101, emphasis added).

RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

Research now indicates that when practitioners use resource-based practices, outcomes are better for both children and families. These outcomes include improvements in children's development, improved parenting competencies, increased parenting confidence, and greater parental sense of personal control and self-efficacy. The following are brief descriptions of some of these benefits.

- Families of children with developmental disabilities enrolled in an early intervention program were the participants in a study comparing the outcomes of a resource-based intervention approach with a service-based approach to obtaining child care resources. Results indicated that the parents participating in the resource-based intervention approach demonstrated the greatest positive changes across time, including increases in the number of people caring for their children, frequency of provision of child care, appraisals of how successful attempts to obtain child care were, perceived control over child care procurement experiences, and overall satisfaction with child care (Trivette et al., 1997).
- Parents of young children with developmental disabilities participating in several different early intervention programs completed a survey about the effectiveness of program practices. Findings showed that children made significantly more developmental progress and their parents had significantly greater sense of personal control when resource-based intervention practices compared to service-based practices were used (Dunst, Brookfield, & Epstein, 1998).
- Families in 11 different states participated in a study to determine the outcomes associated with practices that were either highly consistent or highly inconsistent with resource-based practices. Results demonstrated that resource-based intervention practices were associated with more positive outcomes for families (Trivette et al., 1997).
- Mothers of children in an early childhood/family support program participated in a case study that examined several key characteristics of resource-based intervention practices. Results indicated that the parents gained knowledge or skills when practitioners offered asset-based help that was responsive to and matched the family's interests and priorities, and when partnerships existed between the practitioner and parents. The absence of these characteristics was associated with outcomes that were judged nonhelpful by the parents (Swartz, 2003).
- Low-income mothers of preschool-aged children participated in a 16-week focus group study designed to investigate the applicability of resource-based intervention practices in group settings. Key features of the resource-based approach were judged to be valuable for both consumers and practitioners (Gilley, 1995).
- Outcomes for young children with developmental disabilities and their families were more positive when a resource-based practice compared to service-based approach was used for responding to family desired

supports. The study focused particularly on sources of social support and the types of support that were most beneficial to children and families with varying characteristics and needs (Trivette et al., 1997). Taken together, available evidence demonstrates a number of different benefits from using of resource-based practices.

CONCLUSION

This *CASEinPoint* included descriptions of the conceptual and empirical foundations of resource-based intervention practices. Conceptual foundations include formulations in social network theory, ecological psychology, community psychology, and developmental psychology. Empirical support includes studies which demonstrate enhanced parent functioning, improved developmental outcomes for children, increased parental sense of personal control, enhanced parent and family well-being, and increased community capacity to meet the needs of children and families. The information included in this *CASEinPoint* provides credence to the use of resource-based intervention practices as an alternative to more traditional service-based intervention practices. The contents also provide a basis for further study of the characteristics and consequences of resource-based intervention practices.

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