

Research Highlights

Topic: Participatory Action Research

Lamb-Parker, F., Greenfield, D.B., Fantuzzo, J.W., Clark, C., & Coolahan, K.C. (2002). Shared decision making in early childhood research: A foundation for successful community-university partnerships. *Dialogue from the Field*, 5(2 & 3), 356-377.

Turnbull, A.P., Summers, J.A., Santelli, B., & Markey, U. (2002). Commentary on shared decision making. *Dialogue from the Field*, 5(2 & 3), 377-378.

BOTTOM LINE

The study by Lamb-Parker and associates provides empirical evidence of a connection between shared decision making and positive outcomes for both researchers and practitioners. Using a measure they developed to assess the perceptions of various Head Start and university partners about the nature of their partnerships, the researchers received responses from 58 of 75 Head-Start funded research projects requiring university-Head Start partnerships. They found significant differences between programs with high levels of shared decision making and those with low levels. Specifically, partnerships with shared decision making more often spent the first year of time working on issues of participant rights and were more actively involved in the second year with the mechanics of the research (recruiting participants, etc.), while partnerships with low levels of shared decision making more often spent the second and third years of their projects dealing with problems that were impeding the project's progress. Projects with high levels of decision making were also significantly more satisfied with the research and reported that the research results and products were of significantly greater value to them, than those who experienced low levels of decision-making. The Commentary applauded this research as the first empirical study providing quantitative evidence of the value of participation in research by those who will be affected by it. While these Head Start partnerships focused on partnerships between practitioners and researchers, the same principles and results should apply to partnerships between researchers and family members.

TIPS

- Have a concrete framework grounded solidly in theories about partnerships to provide clear guidance for all members of the partnership about what their roles are and what they can expect.
- Invest time to air and express respect for differences of opinion in the early days of the project; make sure that participants can see evidence of their opinions and research issues reflected in the decisions made about the procedures and measures used in the study.
- Provide a meaningful role whenever possible for family members and/or practitioners to participate in recruiting subjects, collecting data, and interpret results.
- Give family members and practitioners concrete, easily understandable information about the research results and invite their brainstorming about how to incorporate the findings into training and practice.
- Recognize that families or practitioners may have been “burned” by previous negative experiences with research partnerships; therefore it is critical that partnerships be characterized by absolute integrity and openness, scrupulous follow-through, and serious attention to concerns expressed by all members of the partnership.
- Recognize that taking the time to incorporate concerns and research issues or questions from practitioners and family members in the initial design will pay off in terms of the participants’ investment in the research and in the adoption of the principles derived from the results into practice.

KEY FINDINGS

- Projects with high levels of shared decision making had invested time at the outset of the project to engage in dialogue and to develop clearly defined roles for each member of the partnership.
- Projects with high levels of shared decision making invested time in the first year of the project to address concerns of families and practitioners about sensitive issues such as protecting the rights of research participants and accommodating diversity.
- In contrast, projects with low levels of shared decision making reported spending more time in the second year of their projects dealing with problems that impeded the implementation of the study.
- Head Start staff who were part of projects with high levels of shared decision tended more often to participate in recruiting participants, collecting data, and helping the researchers interpret results.

KEY FINDINGS cont.

- In projects with high levels of shared decision making, the results were more often rated as useful for training and professional development for Head Start staff.
- Respondents from projects with high levels of shared decision making were more satisfied with the partnership in general and thought the research findings and products had greater value to them, than respondents who experienced low levels of shared decision making.

NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCHERS

- Apply the Head Start Research Partnership Questionnaire to evaluate the quality and perceived outcomes of other types of partnerships with both family members and with practitioners in other service programs.
- Develop or adapt measures to evaluate family members' perceptions about their participation in and value of research studies.
- Develop and test specific guidelines for implementing community-based research with high levels of shared decision-making.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- Santelli, B., Ginsberg, C., Sullivan, S., & Sullivan, C. (2002) A collaborative study of Parent to Parent support: Implications for positive behavioral support. In J. Lucyshyn, G. Dunlap, & R. W. Albin (Eds.), *Families and positive behavioral supports: Addressing the challenge of problem behaviors on family contexts* (pp. 439-456). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Santelli, B., Markey, U., Johnson, A., Turnbull, R., & Turnbull, A. (2001). The evolution of an unlikely partnership between researchers and culturally diverse families: Lessons learned. *TASH Newsletter*, March/April, 21-25.
- Markey, U.A. (2000). PARTnerships. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 2(3), 188-189, 192.
- Markey, U., Santelli, B., & Turnbull, A.P. (1998). Participatory action research involving families from underserved communities and researchers: Respecting cultural and linguistic diversity. In B.A. Ford (Ed.), *Compendium: Writings on effective practice for culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional learners* (pp. 20-33). Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children, Division for Culturally and Linguistically and Diverse Exceptional Learners.
- Santelli, B., Singer, G.H.S., DiVenere, N., Ginsberg, C., & Powers, L. (1998). Participatory action research: Reflections on critical incidents in a PAR project. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 23(3), 211-222.
- Turnbull, A.P., Friesen, B.J., Ramirez, C. (1998). Participatory action research as a model of conducting family research. *Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 23(3), 178-188.

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