



# Family Centred Practice

Supporting Engagement and Learning Conference

The Sebel Albert Park

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2011



# This session will consider

- History of Family Centred Practice
- What are we talking about?
- Some findings from my research and others
- Is our work really Family Centred Practice?



# What is Family Centred Practice

- Began with more of a medical focus where therapists and specialist were encouraged to work with the parents in regard to the diagnosis and treatment of their children. The Hilton Davis model of working with families is part of this thinking.



# Trouble with definition

- The use of the term is unfortunately clouded by several considerations: two programs might say they are family centered but be quite different in their assumptions, goals, operational features and characteristics; or two programs might be quite similar but use different terms (e.g., family-centered vs. family-focused) to describe their approaches to working with families.



# One definition

- The term family centered refers to a combination of beliefs and practices that define particular ways of working with families that are consumer driven and competency enhancing

Carl J. Dunst , Charlie Johanson , Carol M.Trivette , Debbie Hamby 1991



# Is this Family Centred Practice?

- Parents and professionals can help children separately or they can work together to the greater benefit of the children (Athey, 1990)
- What will this look like in practice? Is the relationship equal or is the professional still in charge?





# Trouble with understanding

- When there is no universal definition that is understood across different sectors inevitably this will filter down to each early childhood educator differently.
- So it is possible in one service that there could be many “Family Centred Practices” occurring or in some cases not occurring.



# Trouble with implementation

- The flow down affect inevitably is:
- if we have different understandings and different definitions then our practice will be different and varied and in some cases NOT Family Centred practice





## What the research says

- “the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievements” (Kasting, 1994 p146)
- Use families' understanding of their children to support shared decision-making about each child's learning and development (VEYLDF, 2009)



# Outcome from study

- The study has enabled the recognition that it is how the EC staff see themselves, their professional identity, and how secure or insecure they feel with this identity that enables an equitable relationship to form with parents or becomes a barrier to such a relationship.



# Outcome from study continued

- To allow equitable relationships between EC staff and parents to occur EC staff need to include “parents/families” in their professional identity



# Strong professional identity

“Someone who has expert information about the child”.

- Knows about the child’s development
- Knows how children best learn
- Understand children and play
- Knows about children in group situations



# Weaker professional identity

## Relationships with families

- Communication with families
- Appreciating families' knowledge of their child
- The perceptions of the role parents should have in the centre



# Thoughts about parents

- “parents were difficult”
- “didn’t read notices”
- “didn’t bring everything their child needed”
- “didn’t care about their children”





# Wanted from parents

- Parents to read notices
- Parents to come to centre with everything the child needs for the day
- Parents to bring back paperwork needed on the day i.e signed permission forms
- Parents to bring child on time



# Thoughts about early childhood staff

- “they felt intimidated by some staff”
- “worried staff thought they were a bad parent”
- “didn’t think staff cared about their child”
- “worried about how their child behaved”



## Wanted from early childhood staff

- To be greeted in a friendly manner and for staff to know my name
- For the staff to show an interest in me and my family
- To be treated in a respectful friendly way
- To be included in the program
- To have a relationship with the staff caring for my children.



# Research

- Elliott reminds us that “too often, parent “involvement” initiatives while well intentioned and purposeful, are superficial and contrived. They become “one off events” or “funded programs” rather than deeply embedded processes”

## How do you communicate with families?

- Do you involve parents in your centre?

Non\_\_\_\_\_Effective\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_Parent

participation      partnerships

control

- What communication style do you use?

## The “Expert” Model

Focuses on child’s behaviour or problem

Holds all  
knowledge and  
control

Looks at child’s  
behaviour from a  
particular point of  
view

The family’s values,  
beliefs and knowledge  
are irrelevant to  
problem solving

The expert imposes  
the information on  
the family



## **The “Transplant” Model**

Focuses on the parent as a conduit of professionals expertise

Imparts knowledge  
but holds all  
control

Looks at child in the  
context of what the  
professional thinks is  
best for the child

The family's values,  
beliefs and knowledge  
are irrelevant to  
problem solving

The professional chooses  
the direction of the  
conversation and the  
questions asked

## **The “Partnership” Model**

Focuses on the relationship between parent and child

Views the parent as  
the expert

Looks at the child  
in context of the  
family

The family’s values,  
belief and knowledge  
are valued and  
utilised

The family choose  
what information is  
used and the final  
outcome.



# Research

Elliott calls this connectedness-

- intentional, purposeful and meaningful relations between children and families and early childhood centres & schools and teachers.
- Connectedness embraces a “feeling of being in touch” and that “we’re in this together



# Children have the right to:

An early childhood experience that is nurturing, educational and fun:


- Where staff are respectful in all their interactions with children at all times.
- Where staff are inspirational and passionate leaders with “people skills” and teacher commitment (Elliott)



# Families have the right to:

Early childhood professionals who are:

- Trusting that parents know about their own children and can look after them as well as the early childhood professional
- Able to communicate through personal interactions as well as newsletters
- Believing that parents have a place in the early childhood setting that goes beyond cleaning.



# What does this mean for early childhood professionals?

- To begin to include “families” in their professional identities.
- Focus on the “How” of your interactions rather than the “What”
- Break down the “them” and “us” thinking





# How to begin this journey

- Rethink your professional identity
- Have another look at how you see parents – what image do you have
- Be brave and rolemodel an equitable relationship
- Trust that parents know what is best for their children
- Start a conversation with parents in a friendly informal way



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