
Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Intervention: Characteristics of Family Capacity-Building Practices

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Parent involvement in early childhood intervention for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities or developmental delays is premised on the assumption that parent-provided early childhood intervention practices will increase the learning opportunities afforded young children

- Early childhood intervention provided by professionals twice a week for 50 weeks in the absence of parent involvement accounts for less than 3 to 4 percent of a 2-year-old's waking hours

Comparative analyses of parent provided vs. professional provided early childhood intervention indicate that everyday learning opportunities afford young children with disabilities or delays considerably more “instructional episodes” compared to more traditional types of professionally-provided early intervention.

- Mahoney and MacDonald (2007) estimated that caregiver-child interactions that occur just one hour a day seven days a week would include **220,000** learning opportunities each year compared to 30 minutes of once per week therapy sessions that would provide a child just **7,500** learning opportunities each year.
- McWilliam (2000) estimated that promoting child skill acquisition in the context of everyday routines would provide a child considerably more learning opportunities per episode compared to once a week therapy or educational intervention sessions.

Mahoney, G., & MacDonald, J. (2007). *Autism and developmental delays in young children: The responsive teaching curriculum for parents and professionals*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

McWilliam, R. A. (2000). It's only natural ... to have early intervention in the environments where it's needed. In S. Sandall & M. Ostrosky (Eds.), *Natural Environments and Inclusion (Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series No. 2)* (pp. 17-26). Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Twenty-five years ago, as part of an attempt to describe the different ways in which parents were involved in early childhood intervention, my colleagues and I developed a framework for differentiating between four models or approaches to intervention:

- Professional-centered early childhood intervention
- Family-allied early childhood intervention
- Family-focused early childhood intervention
- Family-centered early childhood intervention

Dunst, C. J. et al. (1991). Family-oriented early intervention policies and practices: Family-centered or not? *Exceptional Children*, 58, 115-126.

Professionally-centered models view professionals as “experts” who directly intervene with children without any parent involvement

Family-allied models view parents as agents of professionals who carry-out professionally prescribed child interventions

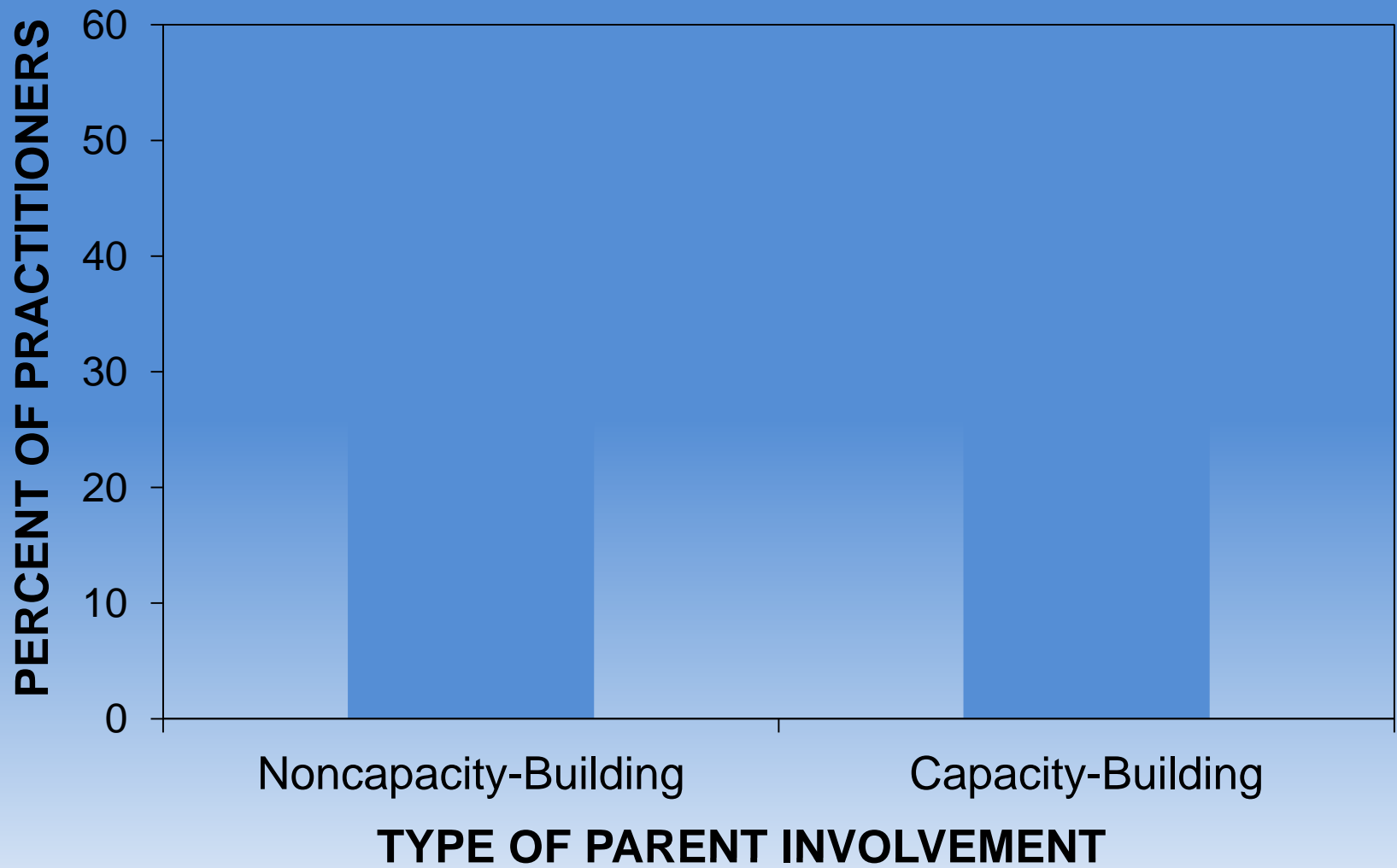
- Family-focused models view parents as “consumers” of professional services where parents implement child interventions with professional guidance
- Family-centered models view parents as capable of engaging their children in everyday activities as sources of early childhood intervention

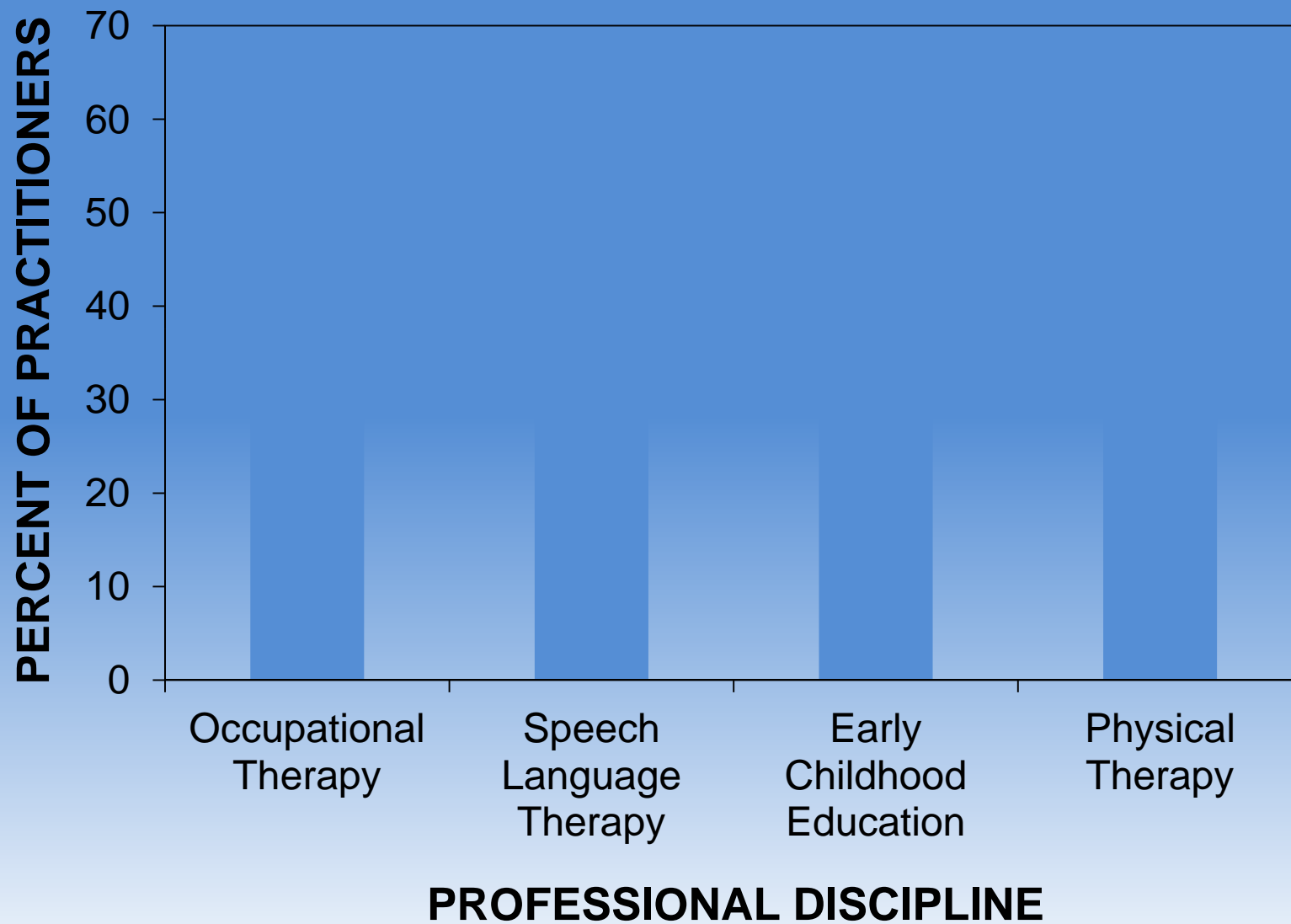
As part of a national study of early childhood intervention practices, parents in 22 states were asked to describe the manner in which early childhood practitioners involved them in their children's early childhood intervention

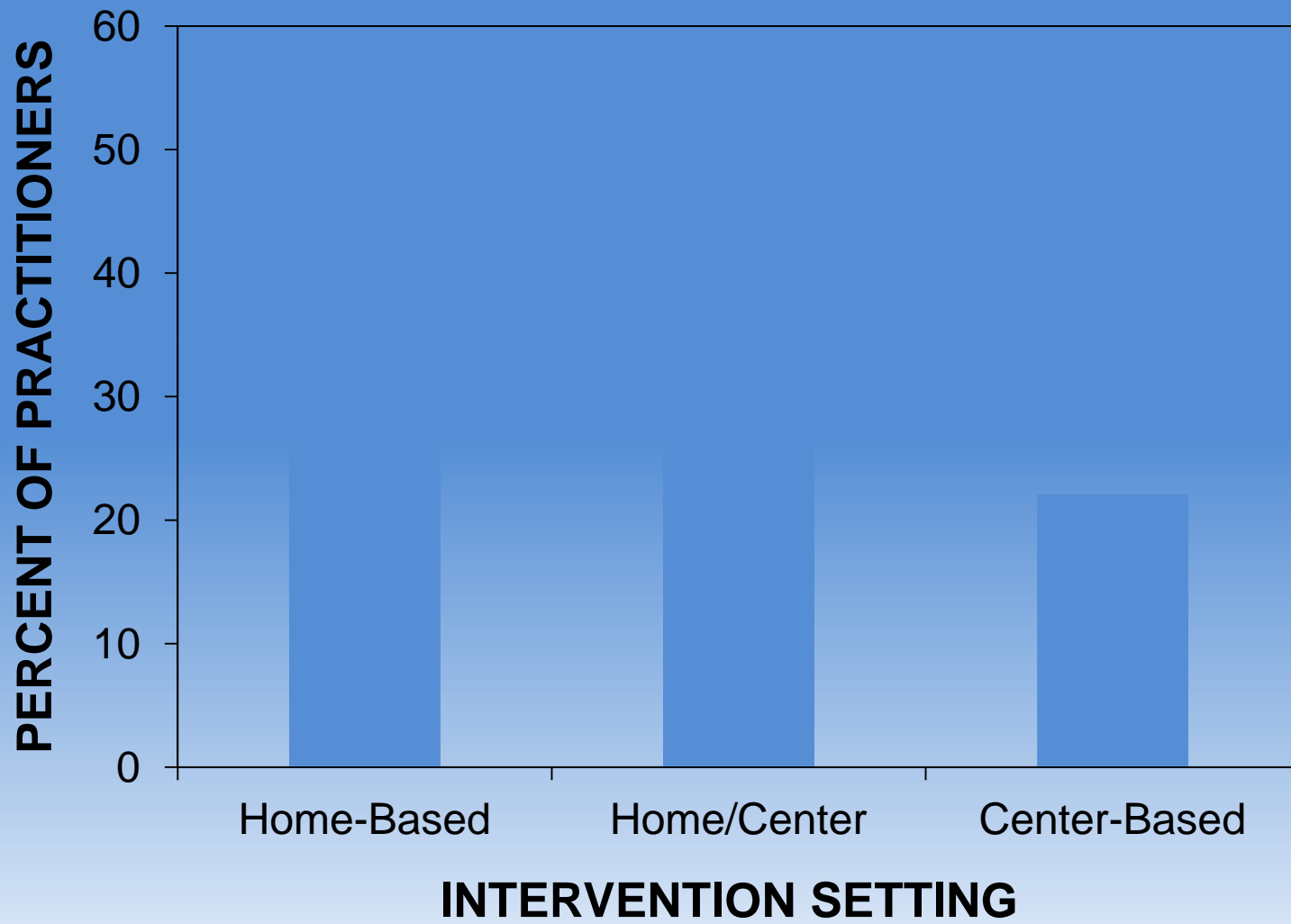
Parents indicated their type of involvement on a 5-point scale ranging from not present when a child received early childhood intervention to actively engaged in providing early childhood intervention to a child

- Parents who rated their involvement either a 4 or 5 indicated that they were involved in a capacity-building manner

Dunst, C. J., Bruder, M. B., & Epse-Sherwendt, M. (2014). Family capacity-building in early childhood intervention: Do context and setting matter? *School Community Journal*, 24(1), 29-40.







Family capacity-building refers to (a) the methods and procedures used by early childhood practitioners to (b) engage caregivers in parenting opportunities and experiences to (c) strengthen existing and promote the development of new parenting abilities in a manner that (d) enhances and strengthens parent and child competence and confidence

Capacity-Building Models

Traditional Models

Promotion

vs. Treatment

Empowerment

vs. Expertise

Strengths-Based

vs. Deficit-Based

Resource-Based

vs. Service-Based

Family-Centered

vs. Professionally-Centered

Dunst, C. J. (in press). Family systems early childhood intervention. In H. Sukkar, J. Kirby, & C. J. Dunst (Eds.), *Early childhood intervention: Working with families of young children with special needs*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Dunst, C. J., & Trivette, C. M. (2009). Capacity-building family systems intervention practices. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 12(2), 119-143.

Models	Main Focus
Promotion	Enhance and promote parenting knowledge and skills
Empowerment	Create opportunities that support and strengthen a sense of parenting confidence and competence
Strengths-Based	Build on existing parenting capabilities as the foundation for promoting and strengthening new parenting skills
Resource-Based	Use a broad range of everyday resources, supports, and activities for enhancing parenting capabilities
Family-Centered	Engage parents in participatory experiences and opportunities to strengthen and promote parenting knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy beliefs

Several different lines of research and practice with parents and early childhood practitioners have focused on identification of the kinds of experiences and opportunities that are associated with capacity-building characteristics and consequences

- Results from these studies have been used to develop an approach to family capacity-building and to conduct research and practice to test and evaluate basic tenets of this particular approach to early childhood intervention

Capacity-building as a set of participatory help giving practices that build and strengthen parent and family capacity

Capacity-building as a set of participatory parenting experiences and opportunities

- Capacity-building as parenting knowledge and skills for carrying out parenting responsibilities and promoting child learning
- Capacity-building as a sense of parenting competence and confidence (self-efficacy beliefs)



Participatory help giving practices include the methods and strategies used by early childhood practitioners to engage parents and other caregivers in everyday parenting experiences and opportunities where parent-provided child learning opportunities are used to promote child learning and development.

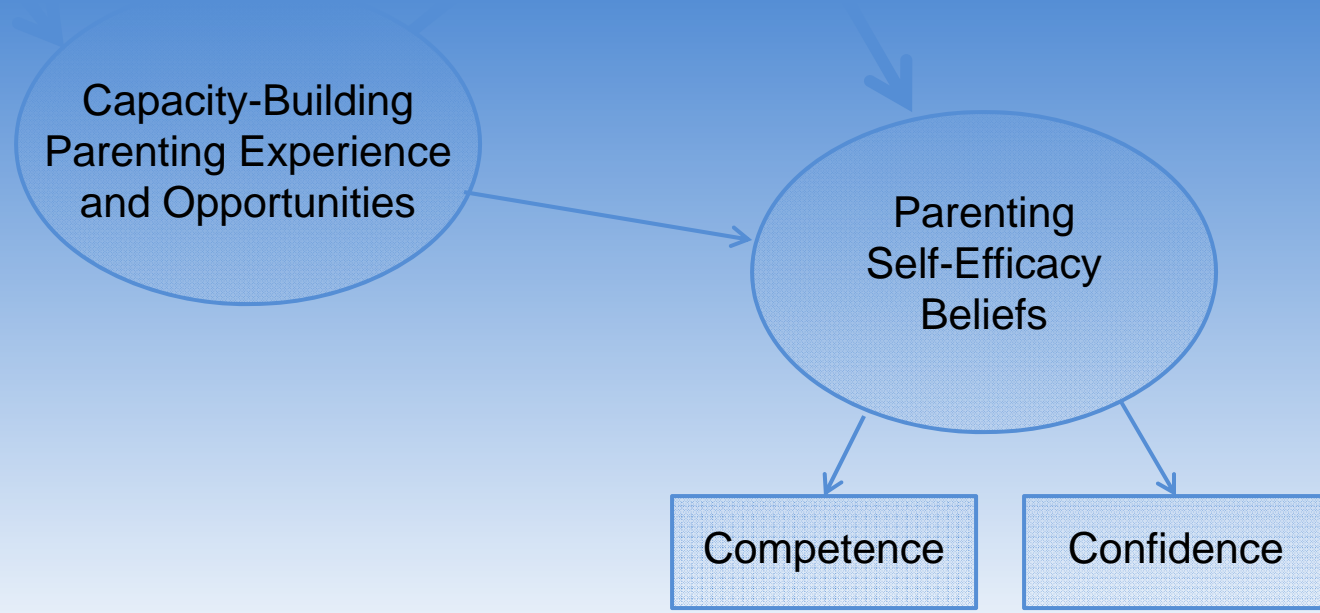
Participatory parenting experiences include the day to day parenting activities, routines, activities of daily living, etc. that provide parents opportunities to engage their children in different kinds of learning experiences and opportunities where these everyday activities are the primary contexts for parent-child interactions that support and strengthen parent and child functioning

The experiences afforded parents to strengthen and build parenting capacity must also influence or change a parents' sense of confidence and competence if a parent is to ***sustain engagement*** in parenting behavior.

- A ***sense of competence*** refers to (self-efficacy) beliefs that one's behavior will have the expected effect or outcome
- A ***sense of confidence*** refers to (self-efficacy) beliefs that one has the capacity to perform a parenting task competently

Capacity-Building
Participatory
Practices

Parenting
Knowledge
and Skills

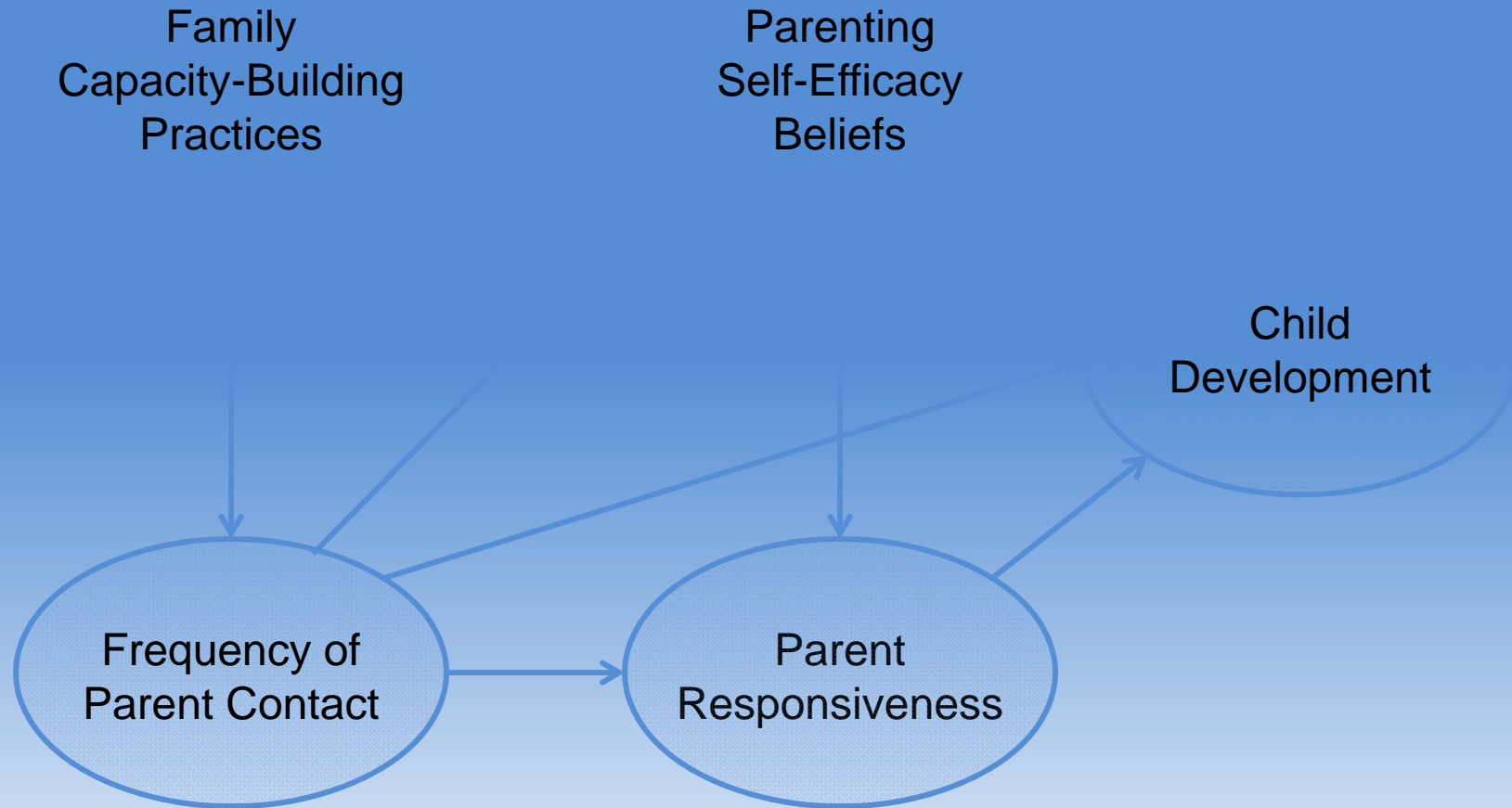


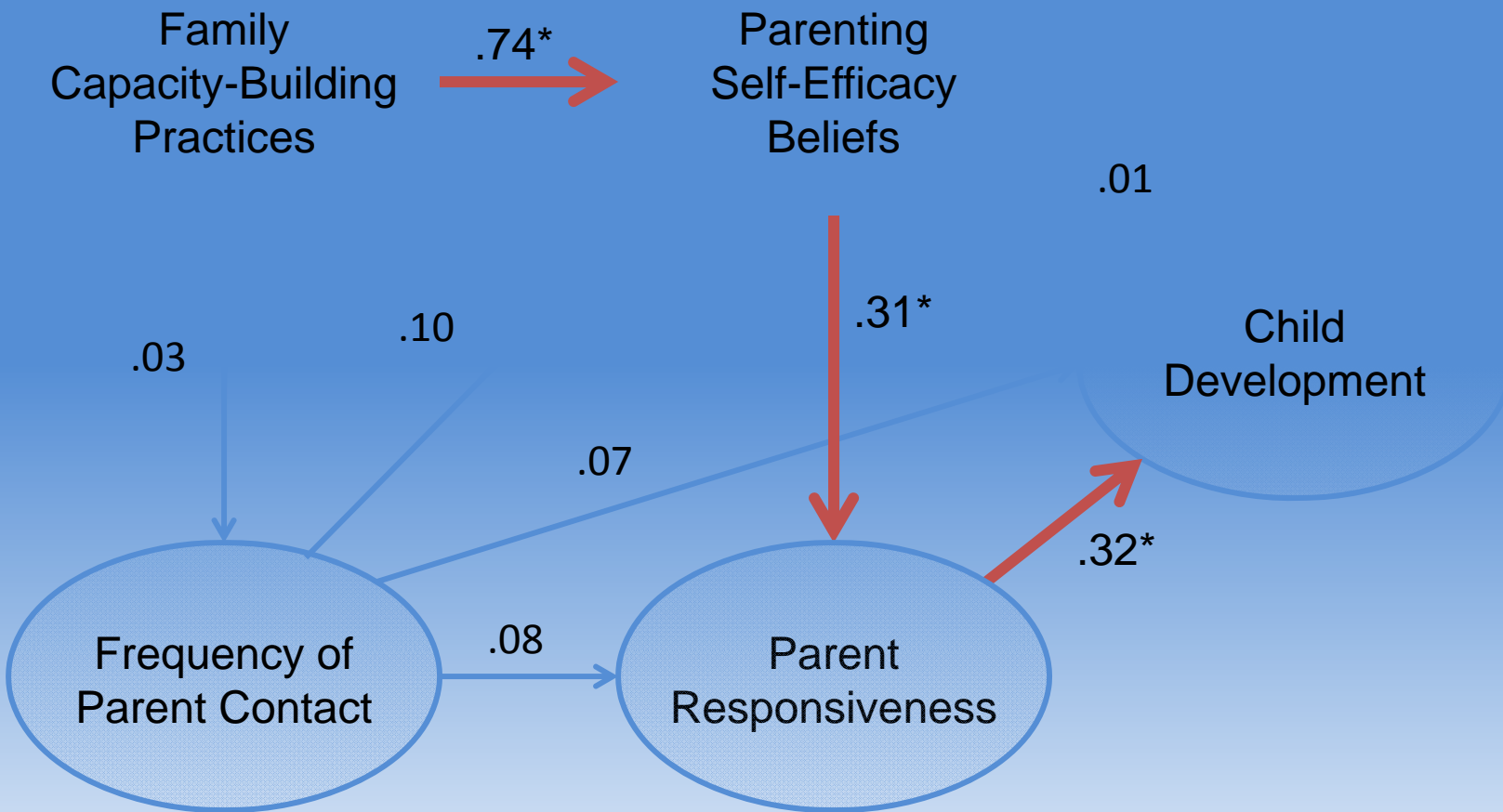
17 studies including 10,000+ infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with identified disabilities or delays and their parents

Secondary analyses of a subset of measures were conducted for testing the relationships among the variables in our family capacity-building model

- The measures included family capacity-building practices (participatory help giving), frequency of parent-practitioner contacts, parenting self-efficacy beliefs, parent responsiveness to child behavior during parent-child interactions, and child development (cognitive and language development)
- Meta-analytic structural equation modeling was used to analyze the relationships among the study variables

Hypothesized Relationships Among the Variables in the Model





* $p < .0001$.

Findings from our research and practice were used to develop an evidence-informed approach to family capacity-building and to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach in a number of studies and demonstration projects

- Results from those studies and demonstration projects were used to modify and improve a capacity-building approach to promoting parents' involvement in their children's early childhood intervention

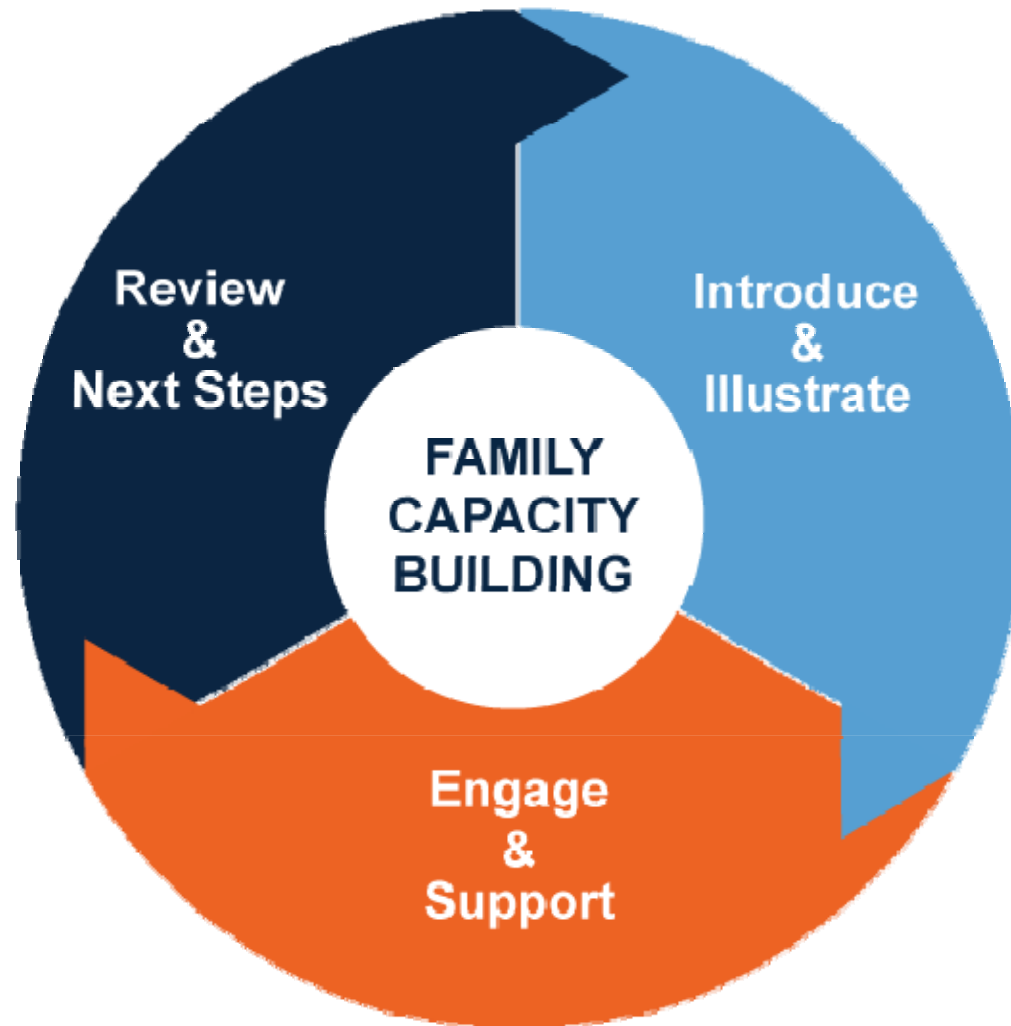
The research foundations for the capacity-building practices used to support and strengthen parents' abilities to provide their children early childhood intervention include:

- Meta-analyses of family-centered help giving practices research that included investigation of the relationships between participatory help giving practices and parenting behavior and practices
- Findings from meta-analyses of adult learning practices that involved investigation of the relationships between authentic (real-life) learning opportunities and adult knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy beliefs

- ***Less is more.*** The fewer the elements in the family capacity-building process, the more likely the elements will be used by practitioners.
- ***Context matters.*** Parents are more likely to benefit from family capacity-building practices the more the practices are used as part of everyday child and family activities.
- ***Accentuate the positive.*** Emphasize the things parents do well and use these as the building blocks for strengthening parenting capabilities.
- ***Parents should be parents first.*** Parents should not be expected to become early childhood professionals when building family capacity.

- ***Introducing and illustrating*** a practice to a parent. This is done by describing an intervention practice and its expected benefits and demonstrating or illustrating how to do the practice
- ***Engaging*** a parent in the use of a practice and a practitioner providing ***supportive feedback, encouragement, and guidance*** as part of and in response to a parent using the practice
- Parent and practitioner ***discussing*** (reviewing) a parents' experience using a practice and ***identifying*** different ways the practice can be used with his or her child

Family Capacity-Building Process



- **Introducing** a practice involves a description of the **key characteristics** of a practice and the **expected outcomes or benefits** of the practice. Introducing also includes a description of **how the practice** can be incorporated into everyday family life.
- **Illustrating** a practice involves **demonstration** of the use of the key characteristics of a practice or showing a video of a **parent using the practice** with his or her child. Illustration “works best” if it clearly shows **what was done** by a parent and what child behavior was **positively affected** by the practice.

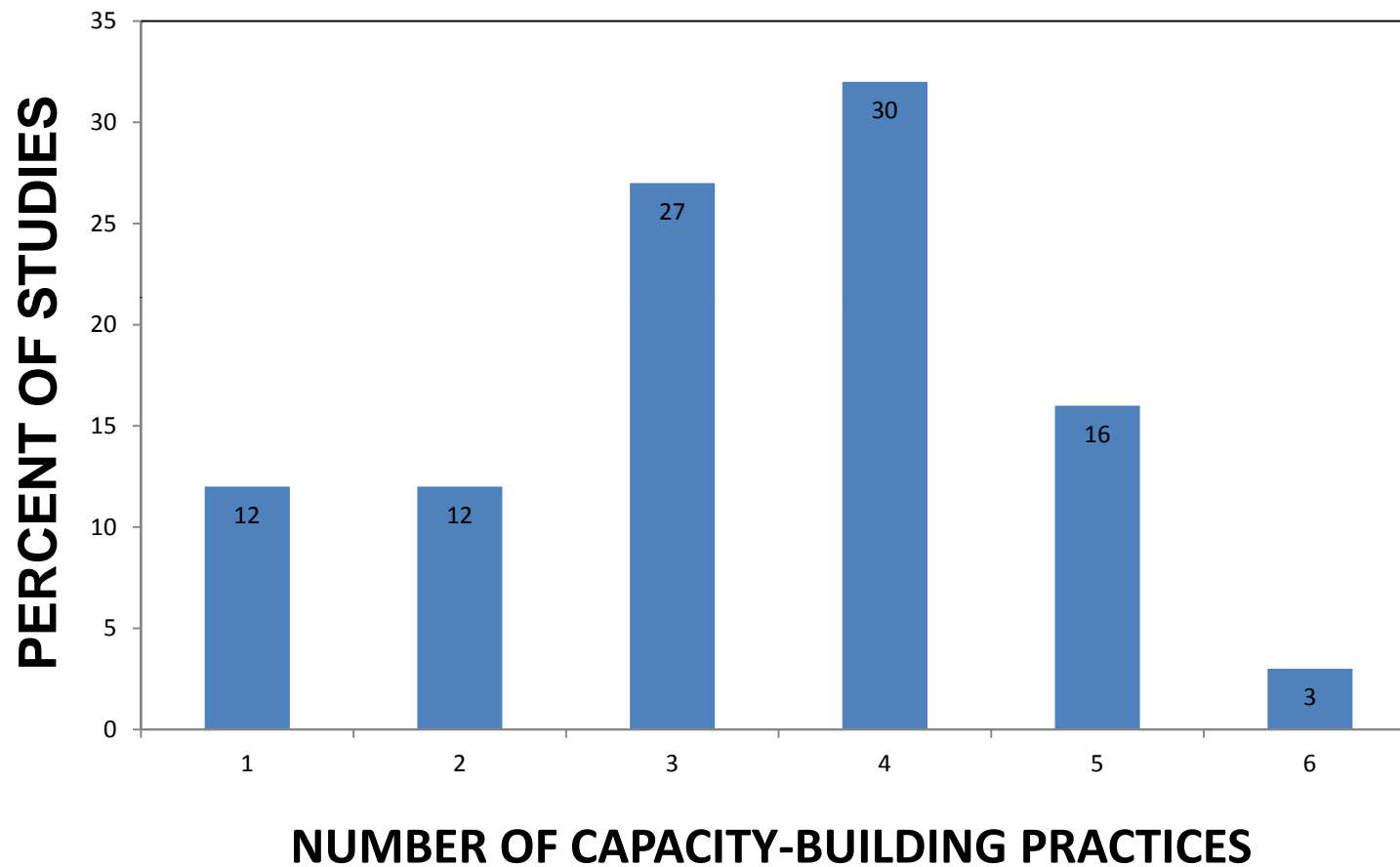
- **Engage** a parent in the *use of a practice* as part of everyday activities that provides a child opportunities to learn/use *functional behavior*. This “works best” when any one activity provides *multiple opportunities* to use the practice where the preponderance of opportunities result in *child benefits*.
- **Supportive feedback, encouragement, and guidance** involves nonevaluative appraisals of *what was done* and *what happened* in response to a parents’ use of a practice. Feedback will be most helpful when it is positive and specific to the parents’ use of the *key characteristics* of a practice and include observable *child benefits*.

- **Jointly reviewing** a parents' understanding (knowledge) and use (skills) of a practice involves informal ***conversations and discussions*** (reflection) about how well the practice was able to be used (competence) and the parents' confidence in using the practice. Embedding ***positive suggestions*** into the conversations will likely reinforce a parents' use of the practice.
- **Next steps** involves the development of an “intervention plan” to ***increase the use of the practice*** in different everyday activities. This includes identifying and using the practice throughout the day in activities where the practice is most likely to be applicable.

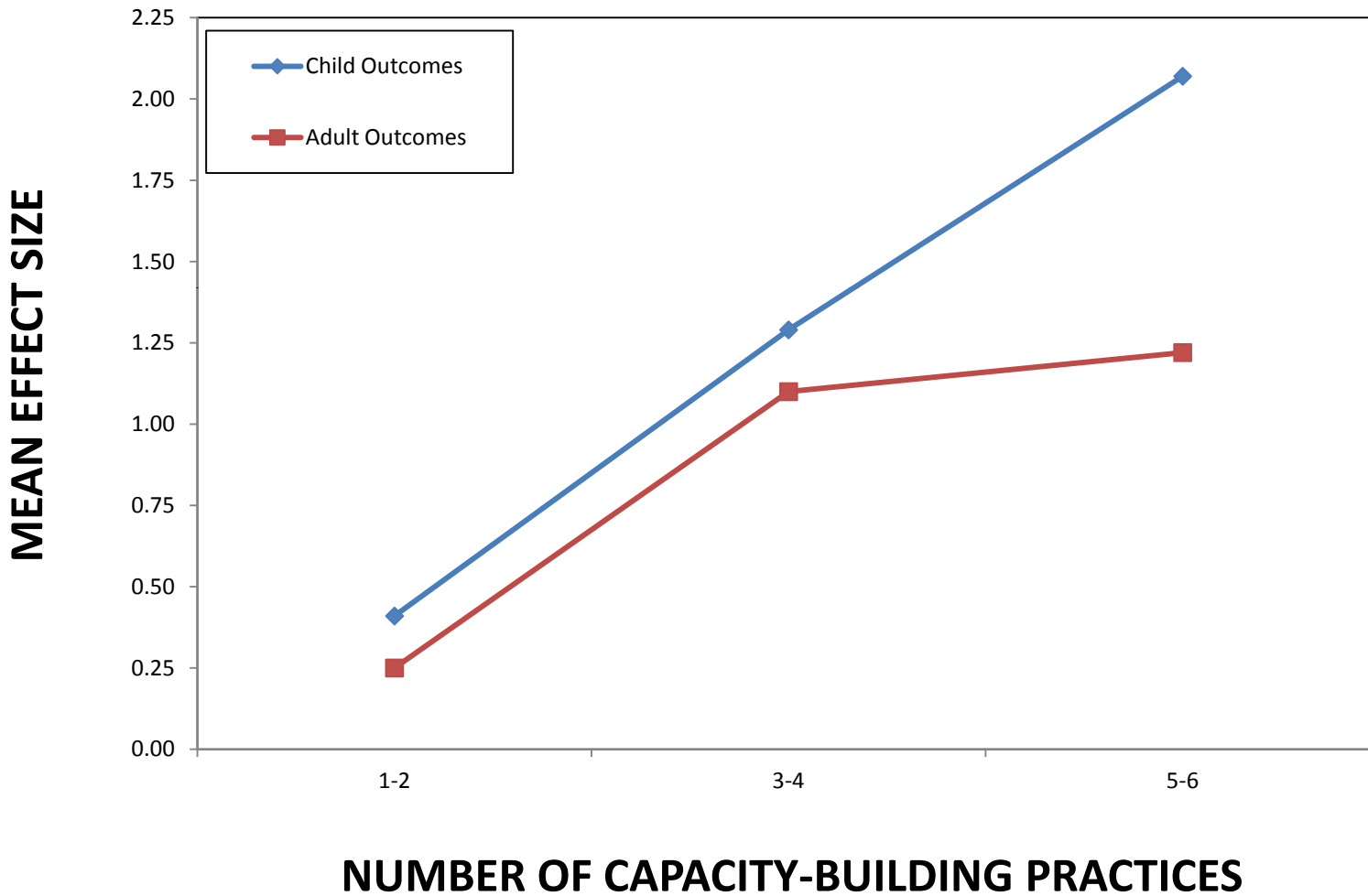
- 25 studies including 820 adult participants and 1075 children with different types of identified disabilities
- The studies were coded and analyzed in terms of the six capacity-building elements were used to promote adult use of assistive technology
- Results were examined in terms of the number of studies that used different combinations of capacity-building practices and their effects on adult and child outcomes

Dunst, C. J., & Hamby, D. W. (2015). Research synthesis of studies to promote parent and practitioner use of assistive technology and adaptations with young children with disabilities. In D. L. Edyburn (Ed.), *Advances in special education technology (Vol. 1): Efficacy of assistive technology interventions* (pp. 51-78). United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing.

Number of Capacity-Building Practices Used In Studies Promoting the Use of Assistive Technology



Relationship Between Different Combinations Of Practices and the Adult and Child Outcomes



Purpose: Promote early childhood practitioners use of capacity-building practices with parents to promote parents' use of (1) interest-based everyday child language learning activities and (2) responsive teaching to enhance their children's language and communication skills.

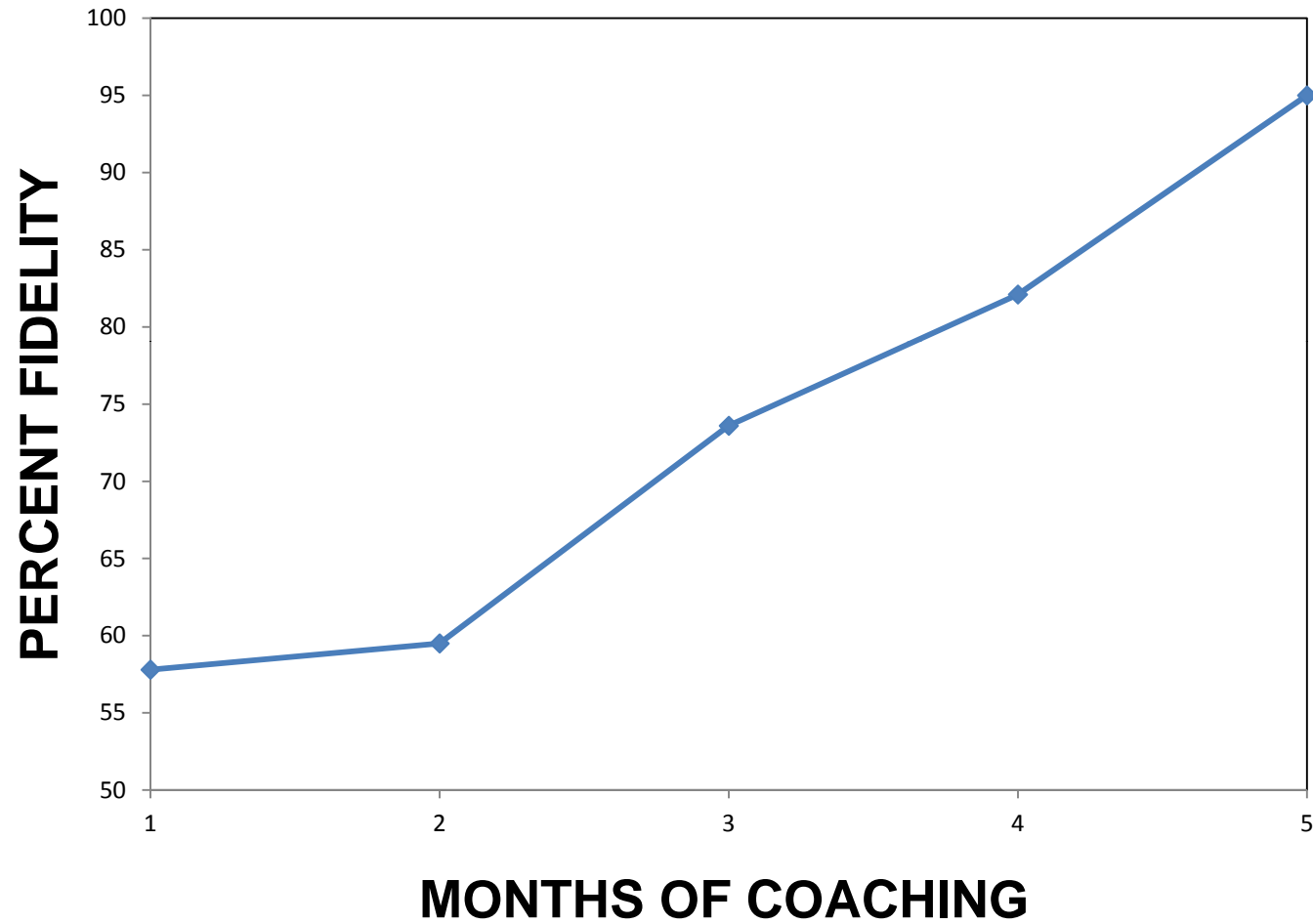
Participants: 21 IDEA Part C early intervention practitioners in 4 programs in 3 different states.

Procedure: Practitioners skilled in using the capacity-building process worked with the practitioners mostly at a distance to promote their use of the capacity-building practices with parents with whom they worked.

Practitioner Fidelity: Practitioners' use of the capacity-building practice was monitored once a month to determine how well they adopted and used the practices.

Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M. & Raab, M. (2014). Everyday child language learning early intervention practices. *Infants and Young Children, 22*(3), 207-219.

Changes in Fidelity of Practitioner Use Of the Capacity-Building Practices



The ways in which early childhood practitioners involve parents in their children's early childhood intervention "matters a great deal" if practitioner practices are likely to have capacity-building characteristics and consequences

The research foundations for family capacity-building practices "point to" the most important features and elements of this approach to early childhood intervention

- The challenge to adoption and use of family capacity-building practices is the need to "make a shift" in the ways in which early childhood intervention practitioners involve parents in early intervention

