

Learning in Partnership: Using Data and Reflective Practice in Programs

Narrator: Engaging families in early learning settings is key to children's healthy development and success in school. When programs and families have strong partnerships, children and parents are likely to have better outcomes. The Family Infant and Preschool Program or FIPP is one example where strong family partnerships are a priority. FIPP serves multiple counties near the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. They provide Early Head Start and other services for over a 1,000 families. Family engagement is key to all they do.

Teacher: You helping him to be successful. Yay!

Narrator: Services are comprehensive and integrated, so that families can get what they need to build a life they want. FIPP is strongly committed to evidence-based practice.

Sarah Sexton: The practices that we use are based on decades of research by individuals across, not only the country, but all over the world who have done work around supporting families.

Narrator: FIPP doesn't just rely on outside research. It's constantly collecting its own data.

Dathan Rush: We gather our research data directly from the children and the families and the staff are all a part of the research piece and help us shape the practices that we would use.

M'Lisa Shelden: We're always talking about what are the characteristics of an effective home visit. What should we be seeing from the children, from the teachers, parent involvement, the environment?

Teacher: Three, four, five, six, and seven. So, these are the fat cows.

Narrator: The information gathering is guided by a particular philosophy, to build a family's capacity to thrive.

Sarah: It really all revolves around this capacity building model that we have. We're promoting what they want to have happen. We're promoting what they want to do well. Not simply preventing deficits. It really is about lifting up families to where they want to be.

Narrator: Though FIPP does offer a center-based component, it also serves its families with a strong home visiting program.

Sarah: We take a primary coach approach to supporting the family. Each family gets one coach. They get one person who is their coach. And it's that person's job to build that trusting relationship with them and to be responsible to them for the kinds of support that they need.

Coach: So, what do you like about doing a learning activity with --

Mother: I like that it gives me one-on-one attention sometimes with each one of them. And it's on different levels.

M'Lisa: The work is actually not about just children. And the work isn't just about families doing what we think they need to do or what we hope that they'll do, but trying to think about how I'm going to support this family in terms of their vision and building their confidence to take those steps that will increase their competence and help them get on their road.

Narrator: Another key principle: Meet families where they are and help them with their priorities.

Coach: Tell me what you know about how she learns the best.

Mother: I think she learns better if she sees you do it first, then she can do it.

Narrator: It's all about focusing on parents as the most powerful agents of a child's development.

Holly: They've had many different support people in their life to help Roger. And so I feel like my job is to help them realize that those people are here for, you know, three hours in a week and how many hours do they spend with Roger? You know all the rest in the week and who's teaching him most? They are.

Teacher: Weeee.

Holly: Oh did you see it? That [inaudible] wheel makes it spin. My role with them is to help them recognize already what they're doing with Roger. For instance, little Roger plays with his father. And while I was there, I said, "Well is there something that he could help with?" Sure enough. Within 10 minutes, they were working on a project together and it was a beautiful example of what they have going already in their family, but with just a little tweak on my part of: "How can he help you?"-- it just opened up a whole new world.

Narrator: Commitment to ongoing improvement, professional development for staff and support for leadership are all critical.

Dathan: One of the ways that we incorporate the research into practice is by providing direct supports to the staff in terms of training. But we know that training alone, according to the research, isn't enough. That really they need the opportunity to put that into practice.

Narrator: Part of the evidence-based approach is encouraging reflective practice in both staff and families. Leadership helps staff reflect on their work and learn about how they can be most effective.

Sarah: In what ways are they becoming more aware of what they know and how they know it and why they're doing it, because that's the evidence around: Is what you're doing effective?

Staff Member: What happens when you give your baby a bath at home? What does she do?

Mother: She splashes and plays and she cries when she gets out.

Narrator: Staff help families reflect on their goals and their progress.

Sarah: It's very different than advice giving. It's really engaging parents and thinking about what it is that's happening. Thinking about what it is they'd like to have happen, thinking about why it's happening that way. When those two things are happening, the outcomes that we can expect are increased parent knowledge, skill, and self attribution.

Narrator: The approach works for the staff.

Holly: Cool. And it's wonderful to be able to know that I can help them on many different levels.

Maria: When they say "Oh I get it. If I play with him and I respond when he asks for my input, then he's learning." Yes, exactly. That to me -- it makes my day

Narrator: And for the families.

NikkiLee: I think it helps to open, to broaden your mind towards different play ways. It's more just see what her interests are and I think that's important.

Tosha: Ms. Holly comes and sees us every Thursday. She's very creative and opening up my mind on what else I could do with Zachariah.

Tamisha: When I first had her, I really didn't know what I was doing, but now I'm more confident.

[Music]