

Adult Learning Process for Promoting Caregiver Adoption of Everyday Child Language Learning Practices: Revised and Updated

Melinda Raab
Carl J. Dunst
Carol M. Trivette

Introduction

This paper includes a description of the approach to professional development used at the *Center on Everyday Child Language Learning* to enhance early childhood intervention practitioners' abilities to promote parents' adoption and use of interest-based everyday child language learning practices. The approach, called *Participatory Adult Learning Strategy* (PALS; Dunst & Trivette, 2009), is used by *Center* staff to promote practitioners' active participation in learning experiences that enhance their knowledge, skills, understanding, adoption, and use of *Center* practices. Caregiver-mediated everyday language learning practices checklists are used as *standards against which* practitioners assess and improve their own practices in an ongoing manner (Dunst, Trivette, Raab, & Masiello, 2008a, 2008b). Practitioners in turn use PALS to promote parents' adoption and use of *Center* practices.

The adult learning process is how *Center* staff provide guidance and support to early childhood intervention practitioners, and how practitioners in turn interact with parents, to promote parents' adoption and use of interest-based everyday language learning activities. Stated differently, the adult learning process is *how* one promotes the adoption and use of *what* are desired or targeted intervention practices. The process is shown graphically in Figure 1. The main focus is the use of the adult learning process as a means to influence practitioners' abilities to support parents' use of *Center* practices.

The *Center* model for everyday child language learning is shown in Figure 2. The model includes four components: (1) Child interests used as the foundation for involving children in everyday language learning opportunities, (2) Everyday activities used as the contexts for interest-based language learning, (3) Increased child participation in everyday language learning opportunities, both within and

This paper includes a description of the adult learning procedure used at the *Center on Everyday Child Language Learning* to promote practitioners' abilities to support parents' use of everyday child language learning practices. The approach, called Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS), includes four phases: *introduction, application, informed understanding, and repeated learning opportunities* to further develop understanding and use of everyday language learning practices. Key features of the adult learning process include learners' active participation in their learning a new or innovative practice and the use of checklists that describe practice standards for implementing the *Center's* everyday language learning practices.

Practically Speaking Volume 2 / Number 1 2010

The model described in this paper was developed, in part, by funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (Grant #H326M070001). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department. Copyright © 2010. Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute. All rights reserved.

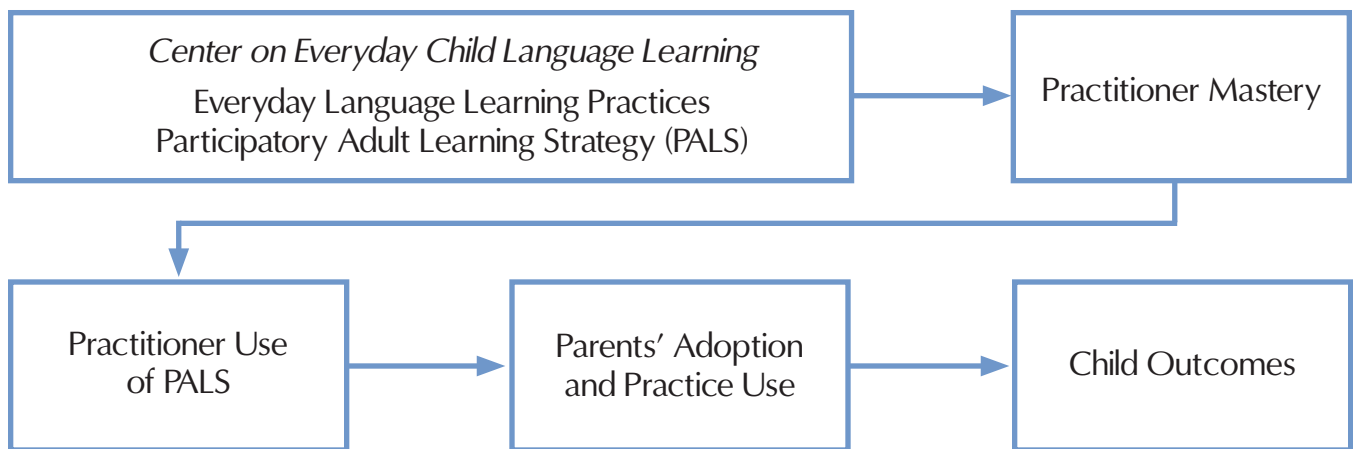


Figure 1. Model for depicting the capacity-building approach for supporting practitioners' acquisition of the knowledge and skills for promoting parents' adoption and use of interest-based everyday language learning activities.

across activities, and (4) Caregiver responsive teaching for supporting and encouraging child language learning in the context of everyday activities. The reader is referred to Dunst et al. (2008a, 2008b) for a more detailed description of the model and the four complementary practices.

Foundations of the Participatory Adult Learning Strategy

The adult learning process that constitutes the *Center's* professional development approach to implementation is based on both theory and research about the conditions best suited for promoting human learning (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Trivette, Dunst, Hamby, & O'Herin, 2009a). Adult learning theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam, 2001) as well as findings from research syntheses and meta-analyses of adult learning methods and strategies (Trivette et al., 2009a; Trivette, Dunst, Hamby, & O'Herin, 2009b) constitute the foundation for PALS.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory is specifically concerned with the ways in which adults engage in self-directed learning and are encouraged to take personal responsibility for knowledge acquisition and use. The theory postulates that adults best learn experientially, relate new learning to existing knowledge, and see the benefits and value of the new knowledge for their everyday practice. The principles of adult learning theory include: (1) adults' active involvement in the learning process, (2) real-life experiences used as the basis for learning, (3) learning that has immediate relevance to the learners' jobs or personal lives, and (4) learning that is practice-centered rather than content-centered.

Research Foundations

The focus of a recently completed meta-analysis of adult learning methods (Trivette et al., 2009a, 2009b) was the characteristics of adult learning strategies associated with positive learner outcomes. Seventy-nine studies of four adult learning

methods were included in the synthesis: Accelerated learning (Meier, 2000), coaching (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990), guided design (Wales & Stager, 1982), and just-in-time training (Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003).

The studies were coded in terms of the presence of each of six characteristics of adult learning based on the findings of the National Research Council's synthesis of research on human learning (Bransford et al., 2000; Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino, 1999). The adult learning method characteristics were: (1) Introducing new material, knowledge, or practices to the learner; (2) Demonstrating or illustrating the use of the material, knowledge, or practice; (3) Engaging the learner in the implementation or use of the material, knowledge, or practice; (4) Having the learner evaluate the outcomes of the

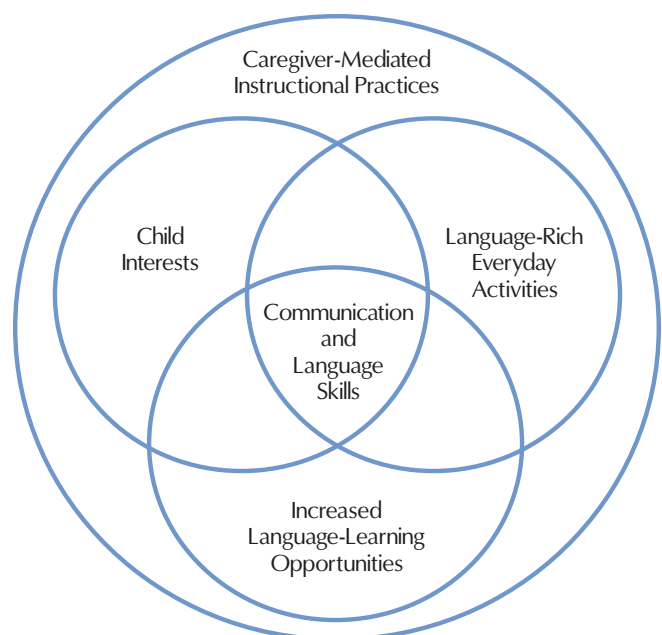


Figure 2. Four major components of the Everyday Child Language Learning intervention model for facilitating early communication and language skill acquisition.

application; (5) Having the learner reflect on the learning experience; and (6) Engaging the learner in self-assessment of the acquisition of knowledge and skills as the basis for identifying new learning experiences.

The synthesis findings indicated that all six adult learning characteristics were associated with positive learner outcomes, and the more actively the learners were involved in their learning, implementation, and self-assessment, the more positive were the outcomes. Also, when the different adult learning method characteristics were used simultaneously in any one study, the adult learning methods were found to be more effective.

Effectiveness of PALS

Versions of the PALS process have been used to promote practitioners' abilities to use family-systems intervention practices (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988), capacity-building helping practices (Trivette & Dunst, 2007), early childhood intervention practices (Raab, Dunst, Wilson, & Parkey, 2009), natural learning environment practices (Dunst et al., 2001), and preschool classroom practices (Wilson & Raab, 1997). The research foundations for the approach include, in addition to the sources on adult learning just described, studies of two outreach training projects that provided evidence of the benefits of participatory staff development. One project promoted adoption and use of a family systems approach to early childhood intervention (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, in press), and the other promoted adoption and use of evidence-based early childhood classroom practices (Dunst

& Raab, 2010; Raab & Dunst, 1997). In both studies, early childhood programs were provided either intensive, repeated on-site training that emphasized practitioners' *active involvement* in implementing targeted practices, or less frequent and less intensive training (Dunst & Raab, 1999; Trivette & Dunst, 2000). Practitioners in the intensive, on-site training programs outperformed their counterparts on almost every outcome measure, including parents' judgments of observed changes in the practitioners' intervention practices.

Relationship Between PALS and Everyday Child Learning

The relationship between PALS and the practices constituting the focus of the *Center's* everyday language learning interventions are best understood as follows: PALS is *how* practitioners and parents learn, adopt, and use practices to promote young children's everyday language learning. The PALS model (Dunst & Trivette, 2009) is shown in Figure 3. A key feature of the model is active learner involvement in each of four phases: *introduction*, *application*, *informed understanding*, and *repeated learning opportunities*. Appendix A includes the six key elements of PALS that are used as standards for assessing adoption and use of the adult learning procedure. The checklist is used by a learner in collaboration with a coach or trainer to self-assess his or her experiences and to determine "next steps" in the learning process.

Figure 4 shows a matrix of the four PALS phases and the *Center* intervention model components. The matrix is a

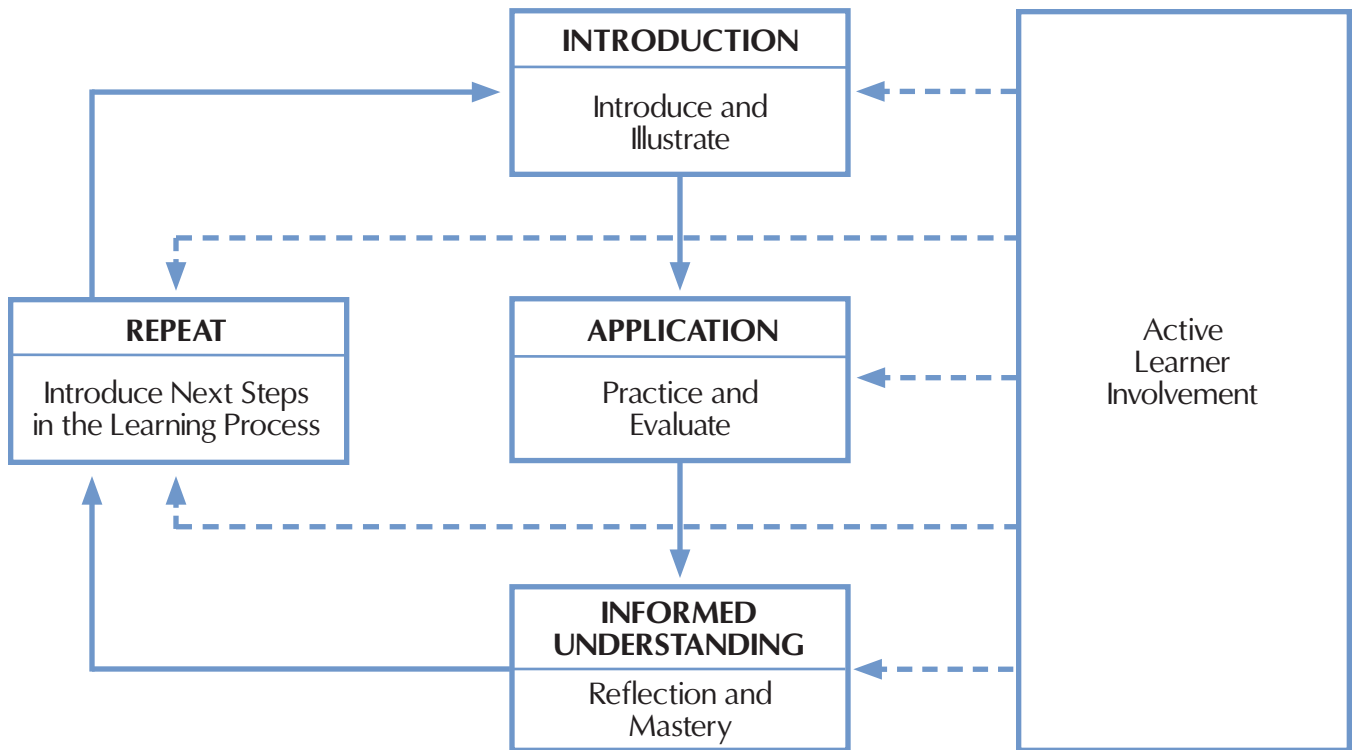


Figure 3. Major components of PALS (Participatory Adult Learning Strategy) for active learner involvement in a learning opportunity.

		Center on Everyday Child Language Learning Intervention Model Component			
		Child Interests	Everyday Activities	Learning Opportunities	Responsive Teaching
Participatory Adult Learning Strategy	Introduction				
	Application				
	Informed Understanding				
	Repeated Learning Opportunities				

Figure 4. Matrix illustrating the use of the PALS process for each CECLL model component.

way of emphasizing how PALS is used repeatedly to promote learner understanding and use of practices related to each model component. For each *Center* model component (child interests, language-rich everyday activities, increased language learning opportunities, responsive teaching), the key characteristics of the everyday language intervention practices are described on performance checklists. The checklist indicators are used as *standards* against which practitioners implement practices and examine their efforts to help parents promote their children’s everyday language learning (Dunst et al., 2008a, 2008b). Appendix B includes the *Everyday Learning Activity Checklist* to provide the reader an example of a performance checklist. *Center* staff use the PALS process to involve early intervention practitioners, and practitioners in turn use PALS to involve parents, in opportunities and experiences that promote understanding and use of *Center* practices for each model component. The reader is referred to Dunst et al. (2008a) for the checklists for the other components of the everyday language learning practices.

Description of the PALS Process

Introduction

The first phase of PALS includes *introducing* information about a practice and *illustrating* how the practice is used or implemented. Introducing a practice is done by describing the key characteristics of the practice and providing additional information (e.g., about the foundations of and rationale for the practice) to increase a learner’s knowledge and understanding. Illustrating a practice is accomplished by providing specific examples of the practice, showing a video of how the practice is implemented, demonstrating the use of the practice for the learner, and so forth.

Application

The second phase of PALS actively engages the learner in *practicing* and *evaluating* his or her use of the practice.

Practice involves the learner’s participation in activities that facilitate his or her use of the practice together with guidance and feedback. These kinds of opportunities include role-playing, having the learner demonstrate a new skill or practice using the practice standards (described in checklists), and providing support and feedback on the learner’s use of the practice. Evaluation involves using the practice standards to examine jointly with the learner the manner in which the learner’s implementation was consistent or inconsistent with the practice standards and why. The outcomes of implementing the practice (i.e., what happened) and the specific learner behaviors that “worked” also are examined.

Informed Understanding

This phase of PALS involves the learner’s *reflection* on his or her overall learning experiences and *self-assessment* of his or her mastery of knowledge and skills related to the practice. The learner uses the practice standards as the basis for reflection on the extent to which he or she understands and has mastered the use of the practice. Strategies such as journaling and group discussions also can facilitate the learners’ self-assessment. Guidance and feedback in the form of behavioral suggestions are used to assist the learner in identifying the kinds of changes that he or she could make in order to implement the practice.

Repeated Learning Opportunities

The *Repeated Learning Opportunities* phase of PALS involves guidance and joint planning with the learner to *identify the next steps* in the learning process. Learners are engaged in using their self-assessment as the basis for identifying the kinds of information and experiences needed in order to better understand and use the practice in a manner consistent with the practice standards. New information and experiences build on the learner’s understanding or skills related to the same practice or help the learner relate knowledge and skills about a practice to the characteristics of another *Center* practice. The PALS process is repeated over time with as

many learning opportunities and as many times as necessary to develop the learner's knowledge and skills.

Illustrative Example

The following example illustrates the use of PALS by *Center* staff with practitioners learning to use the *Language-Rich Everyday Activities* component of the CECLL intervention model. The practices in this component of the model include the identification and selection of family and community activities that provide a child interest-based everyday language learning opportunities. The *Everyday Learning Activity Checklist* (Appendix B), which includes indicators for ensuring that the activities selected are ones most appropriate for child language learning, is used throughout the PALS process.

Introduction. Practitioners are provided information about the benefits of everyday child language learning, and the range of everyday activities that make up children's family and community lives. The *Everyday Learning Activity Checklist* is used to introduce the key characteristics of practices for identifying and selecting everyday activities best suited for children's language learning (e.g., interest-based, frequently-occurring, rich in language learning opportunities). Practitioners also are provided information on the rationale for each of these practices.

The types and variety of children's everyday activities are illustrated by verbal, video, or *in vivo* examples. Practitioners are provided multiple examples of the different kinds of everyday activities that occur in children's lives. They view video tapes of children participating in different family and community activities, and the language learning opportunities that occur in those activities. *Center* staff also demonstrate how practitioners can introduce and illustrate to parents ways to select interest-based everyday activities as contexts for their children's language learning.

Application. *Center* staff actively engage practitioners in experiences that provide them opportunities to practice both selecting interest-based everyday language learning activities themselves and helping parents identify and select learning activities. For example, practitioners have opportunities to view video segments showing children in a variety of activities, and then identify the different language learning opportunities in those activities and choose the activities that are richest in language learning opportunities. They use a case example of a child to learn about the child's interests and everyday activities, and use that information to identify and select activities that are interest-based for the child. Practitioners also are engaged in role-plays where they use the *Everyday Learning Activity Checklist* as a guide to practice assisting "parents" to identify and select everyday child learning activities. Practitioners then use the practices in their interactions with parents to help them identify the everyday activities that will be used as contexts for their children's language learning.

Practitioners also examine their practices using the *Everyday Learning Activity Checklist* to evaluate how they help

parents identify and select everyday activities that provide their children interest-based language learning opportunities. *Center* staff engage practitioners in examining each of the checklist indicators to determine the extent to which they were able to promote parents' understanding and use of the different practices, whether their practice was consistent or inconsistent with the indicators, and what they might do differently.

Informed understanding. *Center* staff engage practitioners in self-assessment of the extent to which they are able to promote parents' understanding of everyday learning activities and parents' abilities to select interest-based activities as contexts for child learning. Practitioners reflect on their abilities to help parents recognize the everyday activities that make up their family and community lives and the kinds of interest-based language learning opportunities the activities provide. They also reflect on the extent to which they are able to promote parents' use of child interests as the basis for selecting activities rich in interest-based language learning opportunities.

Repeated Learning Opportunities. *Center* staff and a practitioner jointly use the practitioner's self-assessment to identify additional learning opportunities that build upon the practitioners' abilities to help parents identify and select interest-based child learning activities. New opportunities might involve obtaining additional information or experiences that promote the practitioner's abilities to help parents expand their understanding and use of everyday activities as contexts for child learning or help parents decide whether to continue, discontinue, or modify the selected activities, or select new ones. Opportunities for learning about other components of the *Center* model might be identified. In this manner, the PALS process occurs repeatedly within and across the different *Center* model components.

Summary

The adult learning process described in this paper is used by *Center on Everyday Child Language Learning* staff to promote practitioners' understanding of caregiver-mediated language learning and their ability to work with parents to promote child language learning. Several features of the *Center's* adult learning process warrant special emphasis:

1. Practitioners and parents are *actively engaged* in all phases of the PALS process as the primary means for learning to use the intervention practices.
2. All phases of the PALS process are implemented with reference to the everyday language intervention practice standards (Dunst et al., 2008a, 2008b). Throughout the process, learners use the practice standards to implement, reflect on, and modify or change their practices to make them more consistent with the standards.
3. The *Center's* adult learning process is a nonlinear and highly individualized process. There is an ongoing effort to guide learning and promote deeper understanding based on observations of learner abilities and on learners' self-assessment of their knowledge and use of the practices.

Center staff use PALS to introduce the Center's everyday language learning practices to practitioners, illustrate how the practices are used, engage practitioners in implementing the practices and self-assessing their use against practice standards, and plan new learning opportunities jointly with practitioners. In the same manner, practitioners use PALS and the Center language learning practice standards with parents. The outcome is continued improvement in both practitioner and parent understanding and use of Center practices.

References

- Brandenburg, D. C., & Ellinger, A. D. (2003). The future: Just-in-time learning expectations and potential implications for human resource development. *Advances in developing human resources, 5*, 308-320.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., Cocking, R. R., Donovan, M. S., Bransford, J. D., & Pellegrino, J. W. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Donovan, M. S., Bransford, J. D., & Pellegrino, J. W. (Eds.). (1999). *How people learn: Bridging research and practice*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Dunst, C. J., Bruder, M. B., Trivette, C. M., Hamby, D., Raab, M., & McLean, M. (2001). Characteristics and consequences of everyday natural learning opportunities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 21*, 68-92.
- Dunst, C. J., & Raab, M. (1999). *In vivo training promoting practitioner adoption of evidence-based classroom practices*. Unpublished report, Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute, Asheville, NC.
- Dunst, C. J., & Raab, M. (2010). *Influences of different types of in-service training on practitioners' preschool classroom practices*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Dunst, C. J., & Trivette, C. M. (2009). Let's be PALS: An evidence-based approach to professional development. *Infants and Young Children, 22*, 164-175.
- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Deal, A. (1988). *Enabling and empowering families: Principles and guidelines for practice*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.
- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Deal, A. G. (in press). Effects of in-service training on early intervention practitioners' use of family systems intervention practices in the USA. *Professional Development in Education*.
- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., Raab, M., & Masiello, T. L. (2008a). Caregiver-mediated everyday language learning practices: II. Implementation methods and procedures. *Practically Speaking, 1*(2), 1-12.
- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., Raab, M., & Masiello, T. L. (2008b). Caregiver-mediated everyday language learning practices: Part I. Background and foundations. *Practically Speaking, 1*(1), 1-7.
- Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida. Retrieved October 8, 2007, from http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nirn/resources/publications/Monograph/pdf/Monograph_full.pdf.
- Hargreaves, A., & Dawe, R. (1990). Paths of professional development: Contrived collegiality, collaborative culture, and the case of peer coaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 6*, 227-241.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., III, & Swanson, R. A. (1998). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (5th ed.). Houston, TX: Gulf.
- Meier, D. (2000). *The accelerated learning handbook: A creative guide to designing and delivering faster, more effective training programs*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Merriam, S. B. (Ed.). (2001). *The new update on adult learning theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Raab, M., & Dunst, C. J. (1997, November). *Influence of classroom ecologies on child behavior*. Poster session presented at the Division for Early Childhood International Conference on Children with Special Needs, New Orleans, LA.
- Raab, M., Dunst, C. J., Wilson, L. L., & Parkey, C. (2009). Early contingency learning and child and teacher concomitant social-emotional behavior. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education, 1*(1).
- Trivette, C. M., & Dunst, C. J. (2000). *Effectiveness of onsite, intensive training on practitioners' adoption of family systems intervention practices*. Unpublished final report, Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute, Asheville, NC.
- Trivette, C. M., & Dunst, C. J. (2007). *Capacity-building family-centered helping practices* (Winterberry Research Reports Vol. 1, No. 1). Asheville, NC: Winterberry Press.
- Trivette, C. M., Dunst, C. J., Hamby, D. W., & O'Herin, C. E. (2009a). *Characteristics and consequences of adult learning methods and strategies* [Winterberry Research Syntheses, Vol. 2, Number 2]. Asheville, NC: Winterberry Press.
- Trivette, C. M., Dunst, C. J., Hamby, D. W., & O'Herin, C. E. (2009b). Characteristics and consequences of adult learning methods and strategies. *Practical Evaluation Reports, 2*(1), 1-32. Available at http://www.practical-evaluation.org/reports/CPE_Report_Vol2No1.pdf.
- Wales, C. E., & Stager, R. A. (1982). Teaching decision-making with guided design. *Journal of College Science Teaching, 12*, 24.
- Wilson, L. L., & Raab, M. (1997, November). *Promoting the adoption of high quality classroom practices*. Paper presented at the Division for Early Childhood International Conference on Children with Special Needs, New Orleans, LA.

Authors

Melinda Raab, Ph.D., is an associate research scientist at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute, Asheville and Morganton, North Carolina, and an investigator in the Puckett Institute's Center on Everyday Child Language Learning. Carl J. Dunst, Ph.D., and Carol M. Trivette, Ph.D., are research scientists and co-directors of the Puckett Institute and the Center on Everyday Child Language Learning.

Appendix A

Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS) Checklist

This checklist includes a process that early intervention practitioners use to promote parents' use of interest-based everyday child language learning activities. It helps you be sure you are using all the steps of an adult learning process that has been found effective in helping parents and other caregivers feel confident in using interest-based everyday learning practices.

<i>Were you able to do each of the following during your time together with the parent or other caregiver?</i>	Yes	No
1. <i>Introduce</i> information about the model component or practice and its important features.		
2. Provide examples, demonstrate, or otherwise <i>illustrate</i> for the parent what the practice looks like.		
3. Involve the parent in actively trying out and <i>doing</i> the practice.		
4. Assist the parent in <i>examining</i> what was done, what happened, and what worked when the practice was implemented.		
5. Determine what the parent <i>understood</i> and the extent to which the parent was able to <i>use</i> the practice.		
6. Determine what <i>additional</i> opportunities will be provided to build upon the parents' understanding and use of the practices.		

Appendix B

Everyday Learning Activity Checklist

This checklist includes questions you can use to help a parent identify and select everyday family and community learning activities that would provide a child interest-based language learning opportunities. The checklist includes indicators for ensuring the most appropriate everyday activities are selected as sources of language learning opportunities. Following your interactions with a parent, complete the checklist by indicating if you did (*Yes*) or did not (*No*) have the opportunity to help the parent use the practices.

<i>Did you help the parent...</i>	Yes	No
1. Identify the family and community activities that are the child's everyday life experiences?		
2. Identify those family activities that do or could provide the child interest-based language learning opportunities?		
3. Identify those community activities that do or could provide the child interest-based language learning opportunities?		
4. Select interest-based family and community activities that provide many different kinds of interest-based language learning opportunities?		
5. Select interest-based family and community language learning activities that do or could happen often?		
6. Select interest-based family and community learning activities where each activity provides lots of different language learning opportunities?		
7. Select interest-based family and community learning activities that are especially likely to help the child practice emerging language abilities and develop new ones?		
8. Select interest-based family and community activities that allow the child to try to use language in different ways?		