



Enhancing Children's Learning in Natural Environments

Presenter: Carl J. Dunst, Ph.D.
Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute
Asheville, North Carolina

April 13, 2004 1:00- 2:30 EST



*Part of a Web-based Conference Call Series Sponsored
by the OSEP Part C Settings Community of Practice*



Definitions of Key Terms

- **Activity Settings** are everyday family and community experiences, events, situations, and so forth providing children learning opportunities having development-enhancing (or development-impeding) characteristics and consequences.
- **Natural Learning Environments** are everyday family and community activity settings providing children learning experiences and opportunities strengthening and promoting child competence and development.

Key Elements of Natural Learning Environment Practices

- Purpose of early intervention
- Supporting parents' competence and confidence
- Enhancing children's everyday learning and development
- The qualities of development-enhancing learning opportunities
- Research foundations and findings
- Research-based practice guides

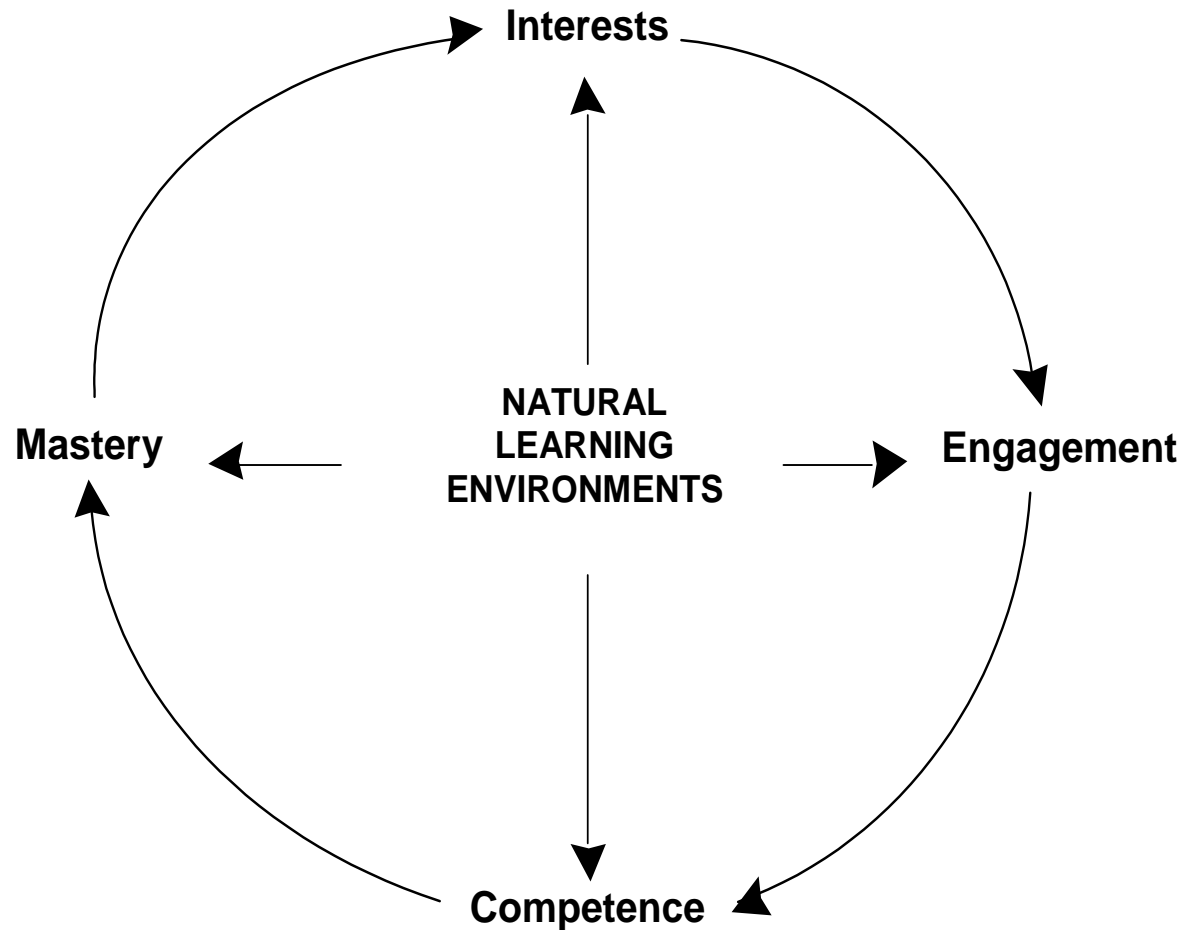
Purpose of Early Intervention

Support and promote parents' competence and confidence in providing their children development-enhancing learning opportunities.

Children's Everyday Learning Opportunities

Everyday life is made up of experiences and opportunities (social and nonsocial activity settings) that are contexts for meaningful and functional child learning and development, and mutually beneficial parent/child interactions, strengthening both child and parent competence and confidence.

Development-Enhancing Learning Opportunities



Early Childhood Intervention Practices Checklist

Early childhood intervention/therapy includes ...

1. Development-enhancing child learning opportunities?.....YES ___ NO ___
2. Learning opportunities that are fun and enjoyable?.....YES ___ NO ___
3. Child-initiated and child-directed learning opportunities?.....YES ___ NO ___
4. Learning opportunities strengthening and promoting child competence?.....YES ___ NO ___
5. Learning opportunities enhancing a child's sense of mastery?.....YES ___ NO ___
6. Parent/child learning opportunities that are mutually rewarding?.....YES ___ NO ___
7. Learning opportunities occurring naturally as part of everyday family/community activities?.....YES ___ NO ___
8. Everyday learning opportunities that support and strengthen parenting competence and confidence?.....YES ___ NO ___
9. Learning opportunities that are congruent with family values and beliefs?.....YES ___ NO ___
10. Learning opportunities promoting child participation in culturally meaningful activities?.....YES ___ NO ___
11. Supports providing parents the time and energy to engage their children in everyday learning opportunities?...YES ___ NO ___
12. Practices respectful of family desires and wishes?.....YES ___ NO ___
13. Practices strengthening parenting capacity to nurture their child(ren)'s learning and development?.....YES ___ NO ___

Research Findings

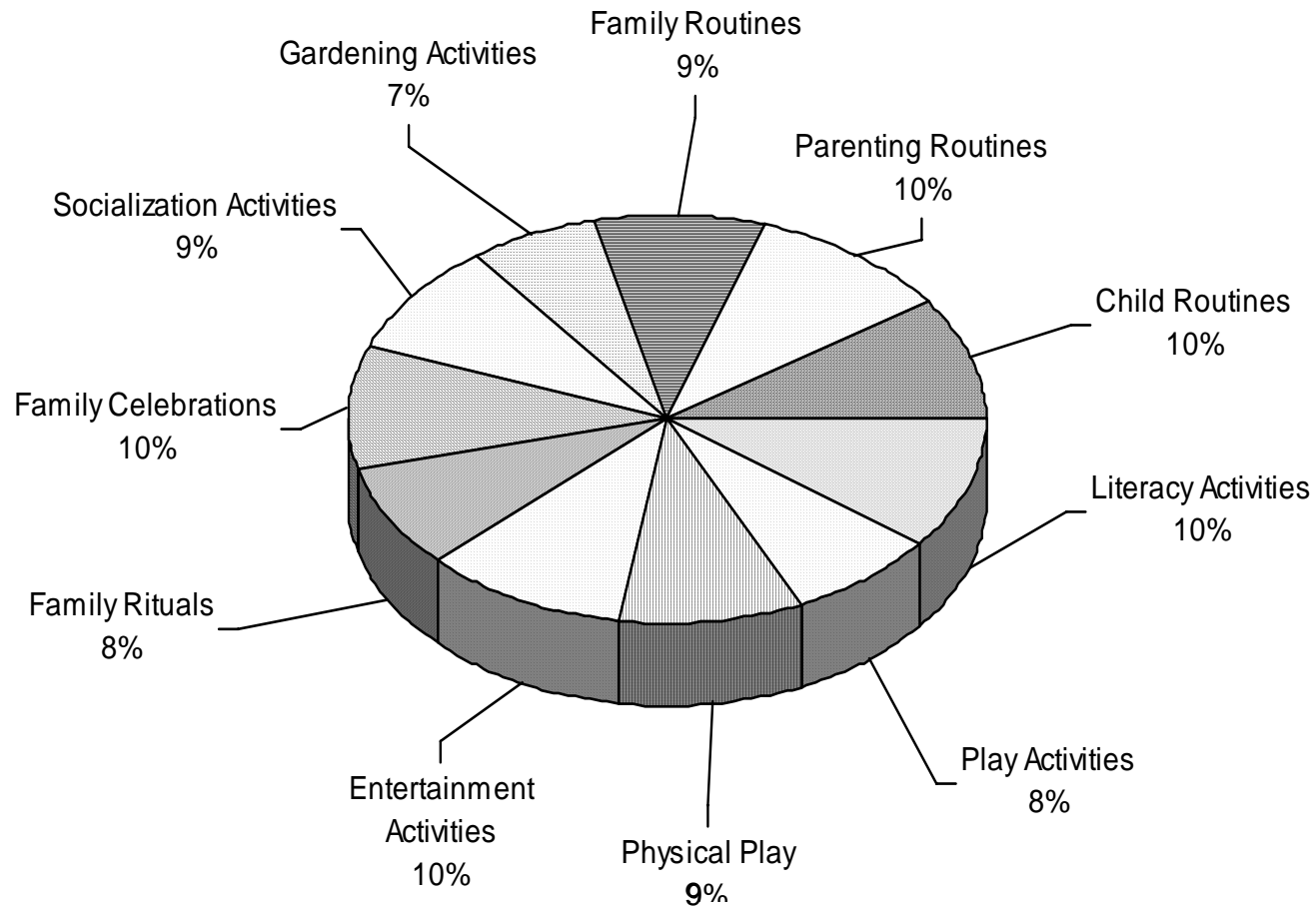
- Sources of Everyday Natural Learning Opportunities
- Contrasting Approaches to Natural Learning Environments
- Characteristics and Consequences of Natural Learning Environments

Research Findings

Sources of Everyday Natural Learning Opportunities

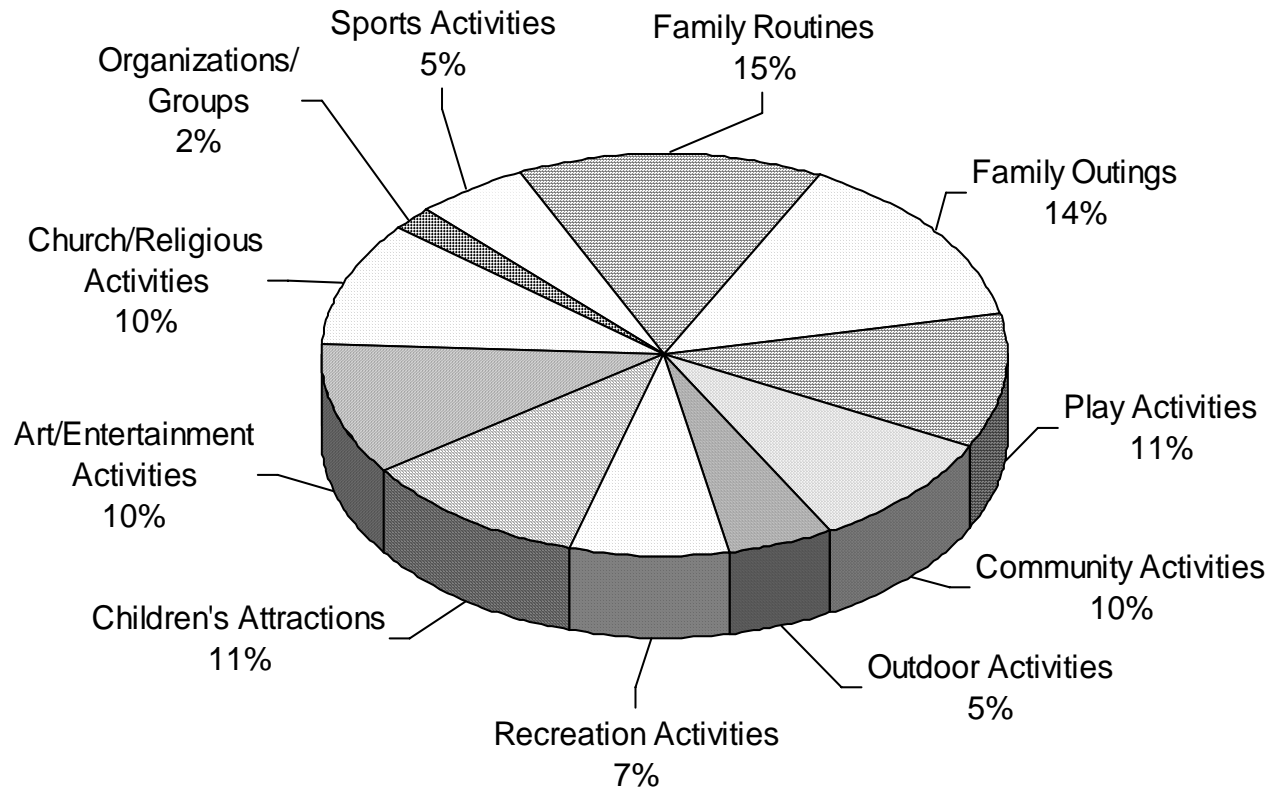
Family Activities (Example)	Community Activities (Example)
<p>Family Routines (Cooking)</p> <p>Parenting Routines (Child’s bedtime)</p> <p>Child Routines (Dressing/undressing)</p> <p>Literacy Activities (Telling child stories)</p> <p>Play Activities (Lap games)</p> <p>Physical Play (Rough housing)</p> <p>Entertainment Activities (Dancing/singing)</p> <p>Family Rituals (Saying grace at meals)</p> <p>Family Celebrations (Holiday dinners)</p> <p>Socialization Activities (Having friends “over”)</p> <p>Gardening Activities (Vegetable garden)</p>	<p>Family Excursions (Car/bus rides)</p> <p>Family Outings (Visiting friends/neighbors)</p> <p>Play Activities (Playgrounds)</p> <p>Community Activities (Library/book mobile)</p> <p>Outdoor Activities (Nature trail walks)</p> <p>Recreation Activities (Swimming)</p> <p>Children’s Attractions (Petting zoos/animal farms)</p> <p>Art/Entertainment Activities (Concerts/theater)</p> <p>Church/Religious Activities (Sunday school)</p> <p>Organizations and Groups (Children’s clubs)</p> <p>Sports Activities (T-Ball)</p>

Research Findings



Sources of Family-Based Children's Learning Opportunities

Research Findings



Sources of Community-Based Children's Learning Opportunities

Research Findings

Contrasting Approaches to Natural Learning Interventions

- Activity Settings as Sources of Natural Learning Opportunities
- Activity Settings as Contexts for Early Intervention Services

Research Findings

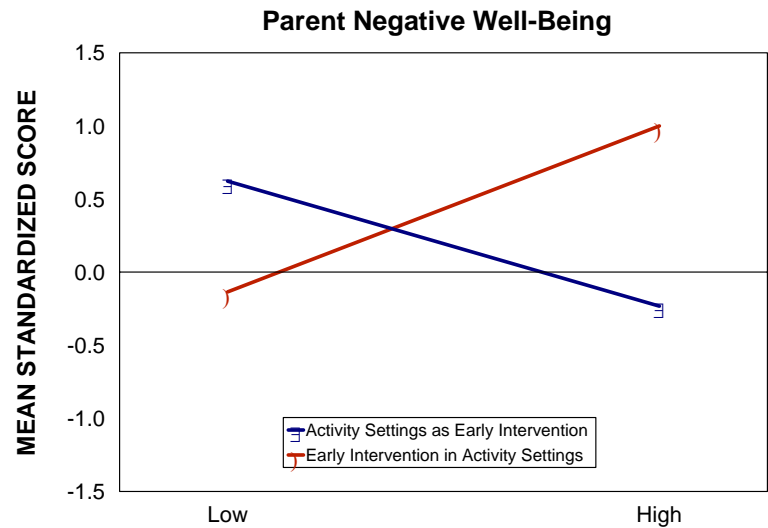
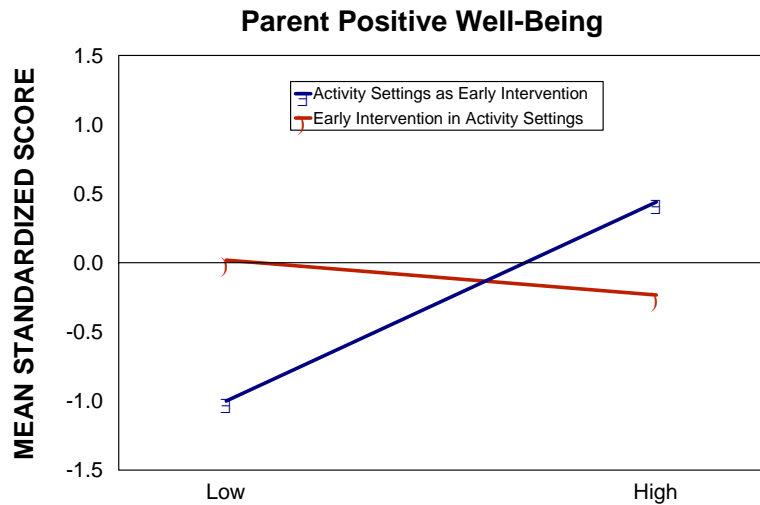
Contrasting Approaches to Natural Learning Environment Interventions

Type of Activity Setting	Type of Practice				F-Test	Effect Size
	Activity Settings as Early Intervention		Early Intervention in Activity Settings			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Family	18.48	3.37	7.74	3.37	2288.66*	3.19
Community	13.81	4.15	7.06	3.37	669.26*	1.78

*p < .0001.

Research Findings

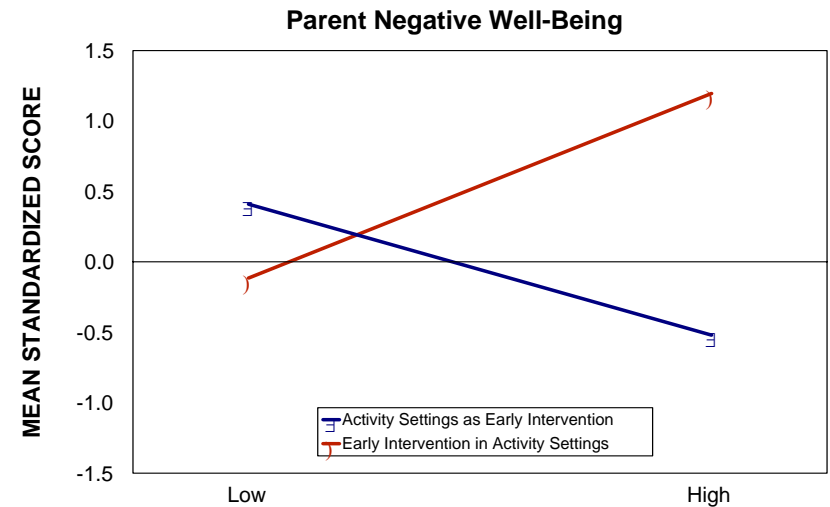
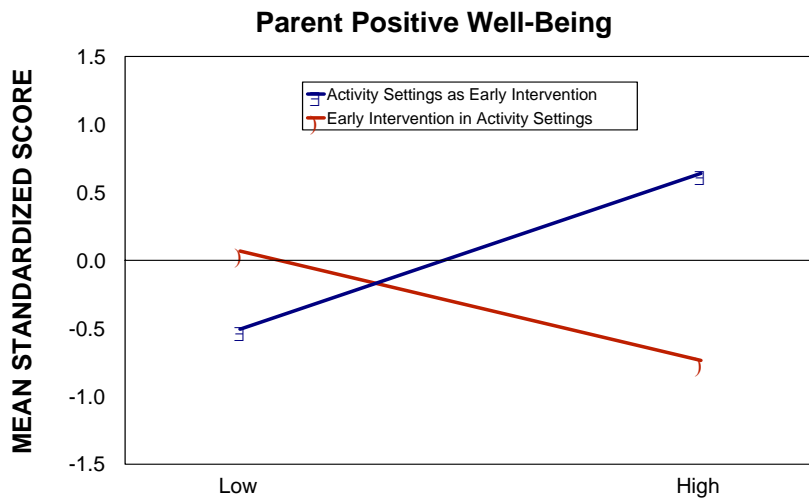
Contrasting Approaches to Natural Learning Environment Interventions



LEVEL OF USE OF FAMILY ACTIVITY SETTINGS

Research Findings

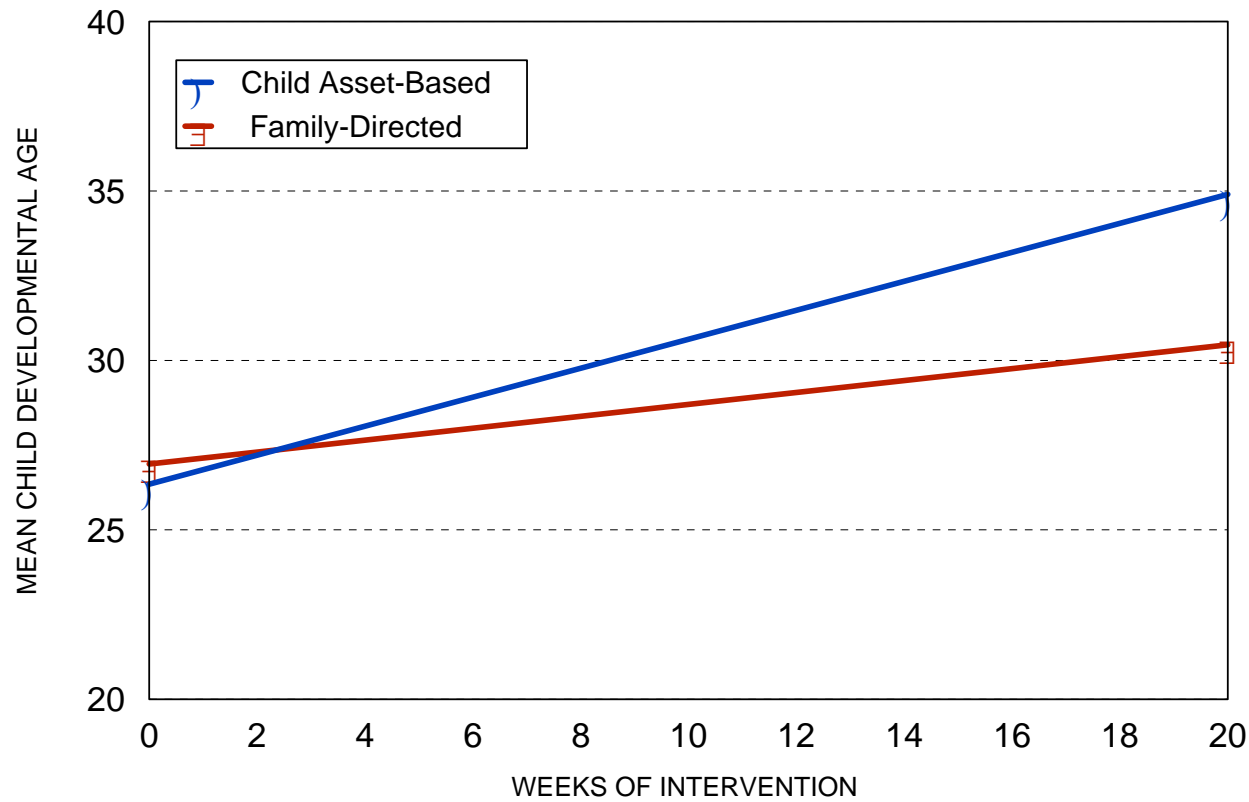
Contrasting Approaches to Natural Learning Environment Interventions



LEVEL OF USE OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITY SETTINGS

Research Findings

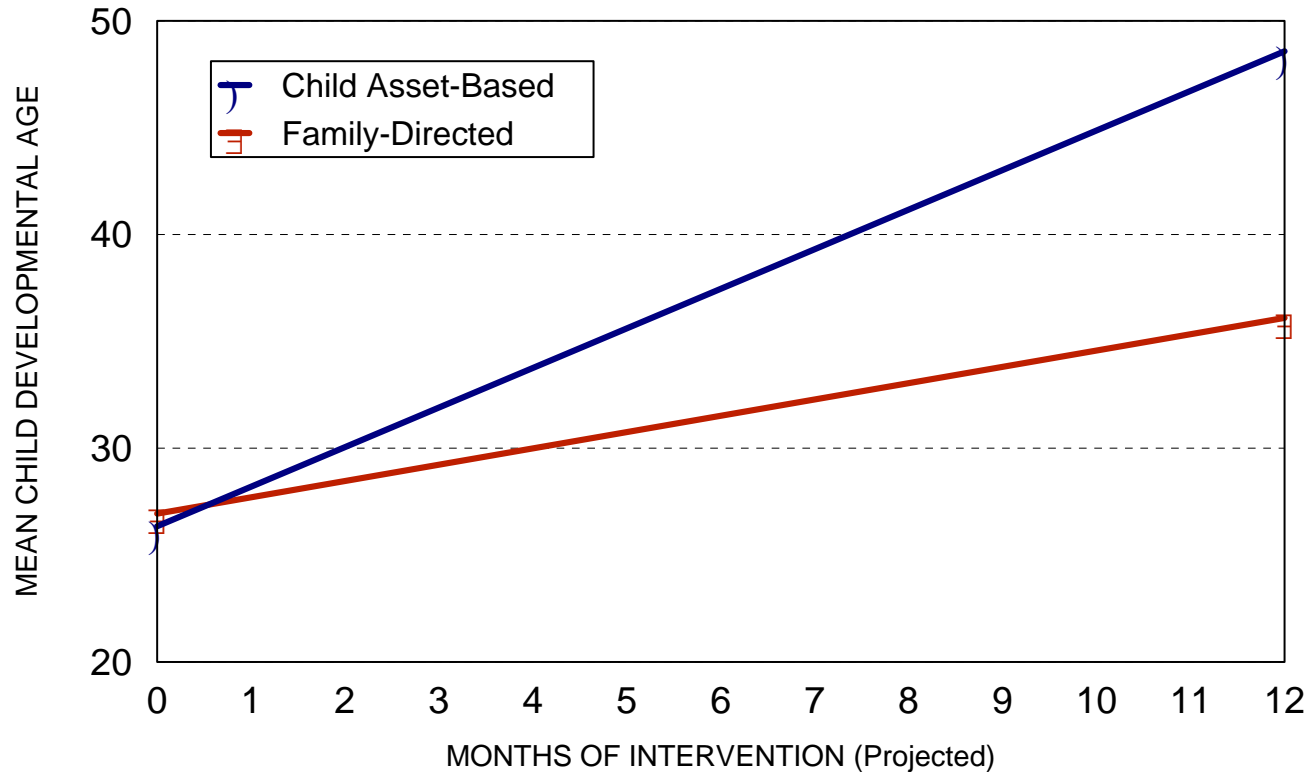
Consequences of Contrasting Approaches to Natural Learning Environment Intervention



Relative Effectiveness of Two Contrasting Approaches to Natural Environment Intervention Practices

Research Findings

Consequences of Contrasting Approaches to Natural Learning Environment Intervention



Projected Benefits of Two Contrasting Approaches to Natural Environment Intervention Practices

Top Ten Must Reads!

- Bruder, M. B., & Dunst, C. J. (1999). Expanding learning opportunities for infants and toddlers in natural environments: A chance to reconceptualize early intervention. *Zero to Three, 20*(3), 34-36
- Dunst, C. J. (2001). Participation of young children with disabilities in community learning activities. In M. J. Guralnick (Ed.), *Early childhood inclusion: Focus on change* (pp. 307-333). Baltimore: Brookes.
- 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., Hamby, D., Trivette, C. M., Raab, M., & Bruder, M. B. (2000). Everyday family and community life and children's naturally occurring learning opportunities. *Journal of Early Intervention, 23*, 151-164.
- Dunst, C. J., Hamby, D., Trivette, C. M., Raab, M., & Bruder, M. B. (2002). Young children's participation in everyday family and community activity. *Psychological Reports, 91*, 875-897
- Dunst, C. J., Herter, S., & Shields, H. (2000). Interest-based natural learning opportunities. *Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series No. 2: Natural Environments and Inclusion, 37-48*.
- Dunst, C. J., Herter, S., Shields, H., & Bennis, L. (2001). Mapping community-based natural learning opportunities. *Young Exceptional Children, 4*(4), 16-24.
- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., Humphries, T., Raab, M., & Roper, N. (2001). Contrasting approaches to natural learning environment interventions. *Infants and Young Children, 14*(2), 48-63.
- Dunst, C. J., Bruder, M. B., Trivette, C. M., & Hamby, D. W. (in press). Young children's learning opportunities afforded by contrasting approaches to natural environment practices. *Psychological Reports*.
- Trivette, C. M., Dunst, C. J., & Hamby, D. W. (in press). Sources of variation in and consequences of everyday activity settings on child and parent functioning. *Perspective in Education*.

Natural Learning Environments (NLE)

Practice Guides, Training, and Technical Assistance

- NLE Websites
- NLE Practice Guides
- NLE Videos
- NLE Resource Materials
- NLE Training Opportunities

NLE Websites

- Everyday Children's Learning Opportunities Institute (www.everydaylearning.info)
 - Research Reports, Reference Materials, Video Tapes
- Power of the Ordinary (www.poweroftheordinary.org)
 - Practice Guides, Slide Show, Posters, Public Service Announcement
- Experience the Possibilities (www.experiencethepossibilities.org)
 - Practice Guides, Assessment Tools, Video Tapes
- Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development (www.researchtopractice.info)
 - Research Syntheses, Practice Guides

NLE Videos

- *Anyplace, Anytime, Anywhere* Video Series
 - Everyday Learning in Family Activities
 - Everyday Learning in Community Activities
 - Everyday Learning in Classroom Activities
- Power of the Ordinary Slide Show
- Possibilities: A Mother's Story
- Spotting My Child's Very Special Interests: A Guide for Parents
- Learning Comes Alive

NLE Practice Guides

- Power of the Ordinary Project (www.poweroftheordinary.org)
 - *Everyday Times* Parent Newsletters
 - Everyday Learning Opportunities Posters
- Experience the Possibilities Project (www.experiencethepossibilities.info)
 - *Spotlights* Bright Idea Pages
 - *Spotting My Child's Very Special Interests: A Workbook for Parents*
 - *Possibilities Interest Assessment Interview Protocol*
- Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development (www.researchtopractice.info)

NLE Practice Guides

Everyday Times



Ordinary Moments: Become Extraordinary Learning Opportunities

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#) || [POWER OF THE ORDINARY](#) || [PUCKETT INSTITUTE](#)

Volume 1, Issue 1

Parks Are Perfect!

for learning opportunities as wide as the sky!

Few places are better for stretching both mind and muscles than the great outdoors. A park's open spaces, playground equipment, trails, gardens, sports fields, and ponds or streams are wonderfully appealing, child-friendly settings where extraordinary learning can happen.

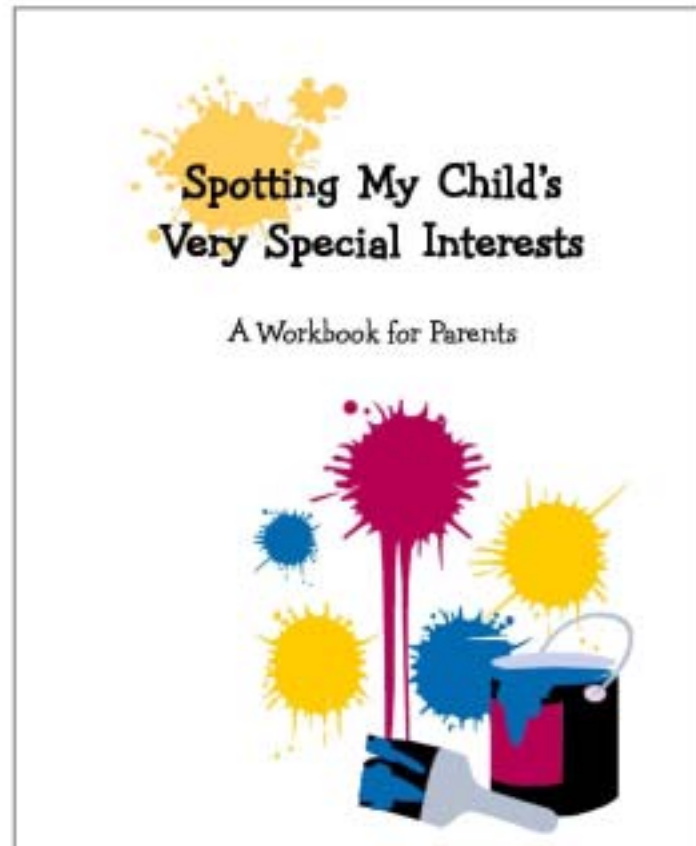
Click a photo to see more ideas!



Experimenting with new ways of moving is easy while running and romping in a park's [open spaces](#).

NLE Practice Guides

Spotting My Child's Very Special Interests



NLE Practice Guides

Spotlights



When the natural world captures your imagination ...



... welcome to a world of adventure and FUN!

From a very young age, some children simply love being outdoors. Even before they have the words to express their preference, they find ways to let caregivers know they want out. They might stand by

wildflower walks, berry picking, tree climbing, bug collecting, and more.

As their awareness of nature grows, many children become very interested in efforts to protect

Six Sets of *Spotlights* Idea Pages

Set 1: Animals

Animal Play
Animals
Birds
Bugs/Insects
Dinosaurs
Dogs
Duck Ponds
Fishing
Horses
Pets

Set 2: Arts

Books/Stories
Clay/Ceramics
Crafts
Dance Classes
Dancing
Drawing
Music
Painting
Photography
Woodworking

Set 3: Games & Play

Building
Chess
Climbing
Collecting
Dolls
Dress Up
Hiding
Sliding
Stacking
Swinging

Set 4: Nature

Camping
Digging
Exploring
Gardening
Hiking
Nature/Environment
Rocks
Sand
Snow
Water

Set 5: Sports

Balls
Baseball
Basketball
Bowling
Golf
Gymnastics
Jumping
Martial Arts
Running
Soccer

Free Set

Cooking
Family Outings
Fire Fighting
Pushing
Trains
Walking
Wheels

NLE Resource Materials

- Everyday Children's Learning Opportunities Institute (www.everydaylearning.info)
 - Activity Setting Bibliography
 - Natural Learning Environments Bibliography
 - Children's Learning Opportunities Reports
- Winterberry Press (www.wbpress.com)
 - Journal Articles
 - Book Chapters
 - Newsletter and Magazine Articles
 - Monographs
 - Spotlights CD ROMs

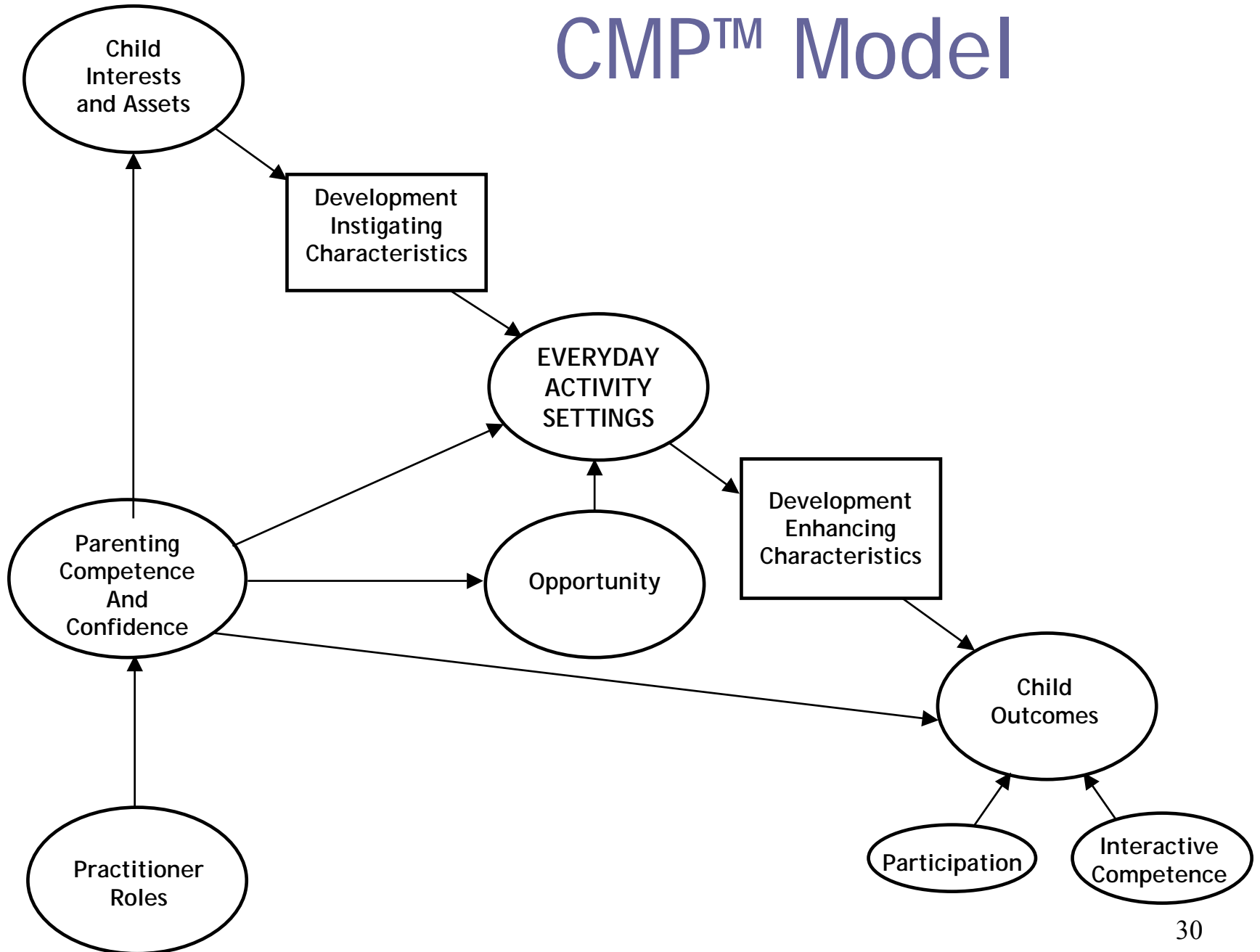
NLE Training Opportunities

- Contextually Mediated PracticesTM Intervention
- Contextually Mediated PracticesTM Therapy

Contextually Mediated Practices™

Contextually Mediated Practices™ is a promotional approach to therapy and intervention that uses *everyday family and community activity* as the sources (contexts) of child learning opportunities where child participation and competence enhancement is *mediated* by the social and nonsocial experiences afforded a child in the everyday activity. The goal of Contextually Mediated Practices™ is child involvement in a range of everyday activities and learning opportunities strengthening existing abilities and enhancing acquisition of new competence furthering child participation in culturally meaningful activity that is both functional and socially adaptive.

CMP™ Model



CMP™ Training Opportunities

- Family, Infant and Preschool Program (Morganton, NC)
 - Three to Four Week Onsite Intensive Training in Contextually Mediated Practices
 - Trainees are credentialed in Contextually Mediated Practices™
- Distance Education Training in Contextually Mediated Practices™ (Forthcoming)
- Web Based Contextually Mediated Practices™ Training (Planned)