**PAPER NUMBER #21**

**Using Intervention Mapping to develop an early childhood educators’ intervention promoting parent-child relationships (E-PCR)**

**Presenting Author**

Amanda O’Connor

**Affiliation**

Deakin University

**Country of residence**

Australia

**Objectives/aims**

The aim of this study was to utilise systems thinking, implementation science and Intervention Mapping methodologies to develop an intervention for early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators to support parent-child relationships.

**Methods**

Implementation science and Intervention Mapping (IM) methodologies were used as the foundation for the development of the Educator – Parent Child Relationship (E-PCR) intervention. IM has traditionally been used for the development of health-related programs, in order to bring together existing evidence-based science, practices, theory and key stakeholders to inform the development of health interventions. Considering ECEC programs are developed and conducted by educators using similar principles to IM protocols (participatory collaboration, use of multiple theoretical paradigms and empirically-based evidence), we proposed that IM provides an opportunity to formally incorporate theory and evidence-based research into the development of children’s social and emotional interventions in ECEC settings. Use of a framework for intervention development grounded in the needs of the child, theory explicitly linked to program outcomes, and a participatory design approach is more likely to result in interventions being acceptable and adopted by early childhood education and care providers. Therefore, this novel approach was used in the development of the E-PCR intervention and to our knowledge is the first ECEC intervention developed and documented using an implementation science approach to support children’s development and relationships within ECEC settings.

Following the IM protocols, an intervention development group was formed consisting of members of the research team, university academics from multiple faculties, directors and managers of an industry (ECEC) organisation and researchers from an intermediary research organisation.

IM steps were followed, and a full needs assessment was conducted, which included: a comprehensive systematic literature review to identify existing interventions that support parent-child relationships in ECEC and a range of parent-child support settings and focus groups were conducted with ECEC educators and peer leaders designed to gain an industry perspective. The program logic and all program outcomes, objectives, design and implementation are detailed in a published paper.

A pilot study was also conducted to assess the feasibility of implementing the E-PCR intervention with educators in ECEC services.

**Main findings**

This study contributes new knowledge to the fields of implementation science, children’s development and early childhood education and care by translating evidence and theory of multiple disciplines into an intervention that has the capacity to impact educators’ everyday practices and parent-child relationships.

We found that there is value in considering IM for ECEC-based programs to promote children’s social-emotional wellbeing and overall development. Considering the similar underlying principles of IM, existing applications within early childhood education and care and development of interventions beyond health behaviour change, it was recommended IM be utilised to design early childhood education and care interventions focusing on supporting children’s social and emotional development.

The systematic literature review examined the existing evidence and found that no intervention has been designed specifically for educators to support parent-child relationships within ECEC settings and recommended further investigation into educators’ knowledge of parent-child relationships and current practices to support parents.

Educator and peer leader focus groups contributed to the evidence-base and found that educators recognised that parent-child relationships are important for children’s social and emotional development and also revealed they had a good understanding of children’s social and emotional development. Practical experiences and observations of parents and children provide a strong foundation for educators to build further knowledge and support parent-child relationships. Engaging in self-reflective practices and integrating explicit knowledge (theoretical approaches and evidence-based practices) with existing implicit knowledge was recognised as an important element required to further build skills and knowledge. These findings indicated that educators are well placed to support parent-child relationships and critically informed the development of the E-PCR intervention.

Bringing together all elements of the evidence gathered during the needs assessment with existing theoretical models of children’s development and behaviour change and socio-ecological frameworks, the intervention development group designed the E-PCR intervention and Building Educator Knowledge (BEK) framework. The E-PCR Educator Toolkit contains: (1) BEK Action Chart; (2) Educator Reflection Template (ERT); (3) information posters: (a) parent-child relationships, and (b) children’s social and emotional development, and (4) Educator Practice Cards: (a) Building relationships with children; (b) Sharing observations; (c) Having open conversations; (d) Knowledge of positive parenting practices; and (e) Addressing difficult situations. And an implementation strategy was designed taking into account evidence collected during the systematic review and educators and peer leaders feedback.

The pilot study examined the feasibility of implementing the E-PCR intervention. Findings indicated that educators readily engaged with the all elements of the intervention and despite differing levels of qualifications and experiences all educators gained further knowledge and skills to support parents and the relationship with their child. Peer leaders reported an increase in educators’ confidence to communicate directly with parents and to provide them with support and information to foster and nurture the parent-child relationship. Educators reported the use of combining their existing implicit knowledge with evidence-based, theoretically driven explicit knowledge was an important element require to build their knowledge, skills and confidence. The E-PCR practical strategies were innovative and well received by the educators as they addressed educators concerns and were focused on embedding changes into everyday practices.

Overall, this study was innovative in its systemic approach to using the IM methodology and protocols within the ECEC setting to provide educators with a co-designed professional development intervention. Using a collaborative systemic intervention development methodology was critical and ensured the developed intervention was relevant and useable for the intended population, highlighting the importance of working collaboratively with end users to develop an intervention.