



TEAM PRACTICES TO INCREASE INDIVIDUALIZATION IN WRAPAROUND

Within children's mental health, *wraparound* has become one of the primary strategies for improving services and outcomes for children with the highest levels of need. Wraparound is defined as an individualized service planning process undertaken by a team that includes the family, child, natural supports, agencies, and community services working together in partnership. The plan created by the team is to be culturally competent and strengths based, and should include a balance of formal services and informal, community, and natural supports.

In practice, however, it seems to be quite difficult to realize this vision for wraparound teamwork. In particular, it appears that teams have great difficulty creating plans that are truly individualized and that creatively blend formal, community, and natural supports and services (Burchard, Bruns, & Burchard, 2002).

The *Teamwork in Practice* project at the Research and Training Center has focused on building an understanding of how team member *practices*—i.e., specific kinds of

skills, techniques, or procedures that team members use—are linked to desired outcomes in wraparound. Here, we describe research results showing that teams that engage in a greater number of *creativity-enhancing practices* tend to produce plans that are more highly individualized than teams that engage in fewer such practices.

In earlier work (Walker & Schutte, in press), we proposed that wraparound teams are more likely to develop creative, individualized plans that effectively meet child and family needs when the team adheres to a high quality planning process. While it might seem obvious that high quality planning is necessary—though not sufficient—for effective wraparound, findings from early phases of our research indicated that many teams did not appear to be using the elements of planning that have been linked to team effectiveness across a variety of contexts. In particular, we found relatively few teams engaging in activities that stimulate the type of creativity that would seem to be essential in creating plans that are truly individualized.

Creativity and Effectiveness

Research on team creativity and effectiveness in other settings has shown that teams are better able to come up with good solutions to complex problems when they employ two particular sorts of creativity-enhancing practices: practices for *broadening perspectives*, and practices for *generating multiple options* (for a review of the research on creativity enhancement in teams, see Walker & Schutte, in press). Broadening perspectives and generating multiple options have a positive impact on team creativity and effectiveness for several reasons. First, broadening perspectives—i.e., examining an issue from new vantage points or considering new information—has the potential to promote increased mental effort during problem solving and decision making, thus paving the way for increased effectiveness in strategizing. Second, generating multiple options—i.e., considering several different solutions or strategies for solving a problem or reaching a goal—has the potential to increase the quality of solutions or strategies available to the team since

ideas generated later on during problem solving tend to be of higher quality than those generated first. Finally, both broadening perspectives and generating options are processes that stimulate further insight into the nature of the problem under consideration, and can lead to a better match between goals and strategies.

Research on teams has also linked specific team practices to creativity and effectiveness. For example, there is research support for the usefulness of brainstorming and similar structured procedures that can be used for broadening perspectives and for generating multiple options. Another technique for enhancing creativity is to consider input from every team member during discussions and decision making. Within wraparound, we propose that team activities around strengths are also practices that enhance creativity, serving as means both to broaden perspectives (by providing new information or new vantage points) and to generate options (particularly when the team consciously constructs goals and strategies from information about strengths).

Observational Study

In order to explore hypotheses about team practices and their effects on team process and outcomes, we studied 72 wraparound meetings from communities around the country. We observed the meetings, collected a variety of kinds of information about the teams, and interviewed team members about their experiences during the meetings. One method of data collection we used was the *observation report form*. The form included a total of sixteen indicators of high quality planning. For each meeting, we checked off whether or not we had observed each indicator during the meeting. Six of the indicators focused on creativity enhancement, and are listed in Table 1. The checklist also included eight indicators

for plan individualization, which were intended to reflect the extent to which teams appeared to be attempting to create plans that used community-based strategies and that reflected attention to the unique needs and strengths of the child and family. These indicators are also listed in Table 1. Reliability was assessed by comparing two observers' responses on the observation report form for a subset of the meetings. Overall agreement was 87%.

As can be seen from Table 1, there was a high degree of variability in the frequency with which the indicators were observed. Among the creativity indicators, *mentions specific strengths* was observed in a large majority of teams, but none of the other indicators was observed during more than about one fifth of meetings, with two indicators observed very infrequently. Regarding the indicators of plan individualization, a large majority of teams made

minor changes to formal services, and about half of the teams discussed providing a *regular community service*, such as a membership to a health club. However, at fewer than one in six meetings was there evidence that teams actually were coordinating, facilitating, or funding such a service. About one quarter of teams were facilitating a *natural support activity*, i.e., a volunteer activity provided uniquely to the family. Coordinating or facilitating a *tailored community support*—i.e., an experience provided by a community member or organization that is like those provided to other community members but that has been tailored by the team—was rare.

To explore the issue of the impact of creativity-enhancing practices on plan individualization, we summed across the creativity indicators and the individualization indicators to create two scores for each observed meeting. The sum for creativity in-

Table 1
Percentage of Meetings Where Indicators Were Observed

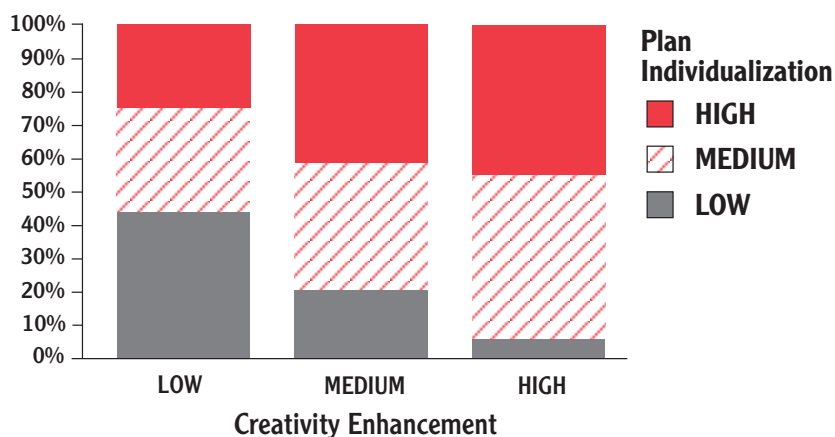
Indicators of creativity enhancement

1. Team engages in brainstorming or other activity to stimulate options or broaden perspectives.	13%
2. Team generates several distinct options before making a decision.	20%
3. Team uses a clearly defined procedure to prioritize goals, needs, or strategies.	6%
4. Team elicits opinions or perspectives from each team member.	7%
5. Team mentions specific strengths or assets of the child and/or family.	72%
6. Team engages in an extended strengths-related activity.	22%

Indicators of plan individualization

1. Team makes minor changes to formal service.	89%
2. Team significantly tailors formal services.	34%
3. Team investigates a regular community service.	47%
4. Team coordinates or facilitates a regular community service.	16%
5. Team investigates a tailored community support.	9%
6. Team coordinates or facilitates a tailored community support.	6%
7. Team investigates a natural support activity.	26%
8. Team coordinates or facilitates a natural support activity.	26%

Figure 1: Creativity and Individualization



dicators varied from zero to four with a mean of 1.3, and the sum for individualization indicators varied from zero to six with a mean of 2.5. We called meetings with a sum of zero “low” in terms of their use of creativity-enhancing practices, while teams with a sum of one were “medium,” and teams with two or more were “high.” Similarly, teams with zero or one indicator of individualization were “low” in that area, teams with two or three were “medium,” and teams with four or more were “high.” Statistical analyses showed that these two

sums were highly associated with one another, such that an increasing level of creativity-enhancing activities was associated with a higher likelihood of greater plan individualization ($\gamma=.325, p<.02$). Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of this result.

Conclusion

Of course, there is more to high quality planning than creativity enhancement, and there is much more to wraparound than high quality planning. However, the potential benefit of creativity enhancement

within wraparound should not be underestimated. In addition to the positive impacts on problem solving, creativity-enhancing procedures have other important benefits as well. In this regard, generating multiple options is particularly powerful. For example, when team members generate a variety of options for ways to meet a need or achieve a goal, they are not just improving their chances of successfully solving a problem. More importantly, they create the opportunity for the family (and other team members as well) to see a range of possibilities, and to select from among them the one which they feel is most likely to produce the desired results *while also* building on or enhancing strengths or assets, supporting family culture and values, and/or promoting integration into valued roles in home, school, and community. Given this range of important benefits, it seems there is great potential for wraparound teams to improve their performance by increasing their use of creativity-enhancing practices.

References

- Burchard, J. D., Bruns, E. J., & Burchard, S. N. (2002). The wraparound approach. In B. J. Burns & K. Hoagwood (Eds.), *Community treatment for youth: Evidence-based interventions for severe emotional and behavioral disorders* (pp. 69-90). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Walker, J. S., & Schutte, K. M. (in press). Practice and process in wraparound teamwork. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*.

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