

Book Review

by

Kristy Alfonso<sup>1</sup>

# **Best Practices for Serving Families of Children with Special Needs**

by  
R.A. McWilliam

In the book *Working with Families of Young children with Special Needs*, the author states many research based practices that can benefit those families who have children with special needs of early ages. This book was written by R.A. McWilliam, who is the director of the Center for Children and Family Research at Siskin Children's Institute in Chattanooga. Throughout the book you can find articulate procedures for planning, implementing, and evaluating family-centered early interventions. As well as it provides many helpful and useful resources such as, checklist, and "how-tos" to use to support early intervention services. In the book there are three basic themes which are: how professionals should treat families, what professionals should do with families and addressing family-level needs.

Understanding what makes up a family is very important and meaningful as an educator in order to be able to design an intervention for a child. In this book identifying families' support and resources is critical in the process of an effective intervention (William, 2010). When working with these families there are different categories to take into consideration in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the early intervention support. The categories consist of emotional, material, or informational (William, 2010). The author did a good job stating the important factors and supports that are needed

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early on in order to have a clear understanding to be able to create these interventions in a child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that will meet the developmental needs of the child but also of the entire family. In the article, *Early Childhood Teacher Preparation in Special Education at 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education* it states "young children and their families are a unit, whose interactive system must be understood and integrated into programs planned for the child". Therefore, getting to know a family well when working with a child with special needs is an essential part of the intervention process and plan.

Then the book moves on to the next part on what professionals should do with the families and talks about assessing families' needs with routines-based interviews. William addresses the RBI as a powerful tool that early interventionist and early childhood special education teachers and their administrators can use in order to plan working interventions and establish positive relationships with the families. The author provides the reader with full details of the process which consists of the five stages for preparing for the RBI. The RBI produces a great source of information about the child and family functioning that makes intervention planning easy (William, 2010). At the end of this chapter in the book you have access to the RBI checklist, the report form and the SAFER Combo which are great tools to implement in your classroom. William also discusses the importance of "competency enhancing outcomes that constitute measures of successful or effective early childhood intervention practices". He wants people to be aware of how children learn and how the implementation of the caregiver practices is routines based. He relates how to reach out to the caregivers and how they can encourage child learning as part of children's participation in everyday activities which is very important.

While reading the chapter on coordinating services with families, the reader is able to gather information of all early intervention supports and services provided to infants, toddlers, and families. This is a great tool to be able to implement service coordination effectively.

As educators we are always communicating with parents, the question is what can we say to the families at any point in the process? The author discusses the strategies for working with families in specific context for example, during a child's IEP process. The author stated something very true, when talking to families it's about how to talk in ways that promote trust, respect, and a sense of equality (William, p.127). In the article *using family based practices for young children with special needs in preschool* points out a statement which goes hand in hand with the view of the author William has in mind; The way in which professionals communicate and interact with families has a direct impact on parent-professional relationships, as well as child outcomes. Parents must be given the time they need to make decisions and brainstorm options even if teachers themselves are given a certain deadline (Raver, 2005). Parents need the opportunity to be a part of their child's team for academic success.

William does a phenomenal job at addressing the different ways on how to approach the families; he even highlights some ways to build relationships with families from diverse backgrounds. Accepting people for who they are and what they bring in background and experience is essential to the communication process (William, p.160). As a teacher we face a variety of ethnicity in our classrooms every year and having read this chapter from the book really helped get a broader idea.

Throughout William's book, he offers advanced thinking appropriate methods when working with families of young children with special needs. What Williams means by "advanced thinking" is the information is largely based on research or consistent with theory. This book shows effective implications for ways of serving families in a supportive manner as well as implications for making resources available to families. If you are a special educator that is looking for practical information in great detail this book will be pertinent to you.

## References

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