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Learning to Listen

Teaching an Active Listening Strategy to Preservice Education Professionals

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The importance of parent–teacher communication has been widely recognized; however, there is only limited research on teaching effective listening skills to education professionals. In this study, a pretest–posttest control group design was used to examine the effect of instruction on the active listening skills of preservice education professionals. Instruction resulted in statistically significant improvement for targeted active listening skills. As a measure of social validity, parents of preschool and school-age children viewed pre- and postinstruction videotapes of preservice education professionals in role-play conversations. The parents judged the postinstruction performances of the preservice education professionals to be better examples of effective communication than the preinstruction performances of the preservice education professionals.

Keywords: *parent–teacher communication; active listening; preservice education professionals*

The importance of effective parent–teacher communication has been recognized by parents (Harry, 1992; Walker & MacLure, 2001), early intervention specialists (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kilbride, Chud, & Lange, 1998; Lea, 2006; Sumsion, 1999), and special education professionals (O’Shea, Algozzine, Hammittee, & O’Shea, 2000; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). Communication is key to effective collaboration and to building cooperative relationships between families and education professionals (Harry, 1992; Lasky, 2000).

There are numerous opportunities for parent–teacher interaction in early childhood programs, including both formal parent–teacher interactions, such as the individualized family service plan meeting (Gelfer & Perkins, 1987), and informal exchanges that take place as children arrive and depart from programs (Smith & Hubbard, 1988b). Early childhood programs that promote communication between parents and teachers are typically rated higher in quality (Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994; Smith & Hubbard, 1988a). These communication

exchanges can help early childhood professionals better understand the parent’s perception of his or her child and the parent’s impressions and expectations for the program, and can help to build a working relationship that can support strong home–program collaboration (Gelfer & Perkins, 1987; Sheridan, Clarke, Knoche, & Edwards, 2007; Shivers, Howes, Wishard, & Ritchie, 2004). Too often, however, family–professional communication in early intervention is viewed by parents as “nonempathetic, distrustful, and void of mutual respect” (Lea, 2006, p. 276), and parents report that their views on substantive issues, such as goal setting and decision making, are ignored (Bernhard et al., 1998).

The use of active listening skills has been found to play an important role in effective communication (O’Shea

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et al., 2000). Active listening has been described as a multistep process, including making empathetic comments, asking appropriate questions, and paraphrasing and summarizing for the purposes of verification (Cramer, 1998; Gordon, 2003; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). The goal in active listening is to develop a clear understanding of the speaker's concern and also to clearly communicate the listener's interest in the speaker's message.

Recognition of the importance of active listening has resulted in systematic investigation of the use of active listening skills in other helping professions. In a study examining the communication skills of nurses as they worked with families experiencing a medical emergency, Duhamel and Tabot (2004) reported that the use of active listening skills helped nurses to establish a trusting relationship with family participants. Mansfield (1991) used supervised roleplays to teach active listening skills to medical students; based on a videotape analysis of their pre- and postinstruction performances, the medical students who had received training were judged to be more skilled in their use of active listening skills and in developing appropriate management plans for their patients. Paukert, Stagner, and Hope (2004) reported that 45 hours of training in active listening and counseling skills produced positive changes in the active listening skills of helpline volunteers as determined by supervisor ratings.

Lasky (2000) suggested that by using active listening skills, education professionals can gain important information with which to work and at the same time communicate to a parent a sincere interest in understanding the parent's point of view. Although there is recognition of the need for improved communication between teachers and parents (Bernhard et al., 1998; Lea, 2006), at present there are few empirically validated interventions to address the communication skills of education professionals (Lasky, 2000).

Research Objectives

This study provides an initial investigation of an instructional package designed to teach active listening skills to preservice education professionals. The impact of instruction was measured using a scored analysis of participant performance in pre- and postinstruction roleplays, and data on the perceived importance of the targeted listening skills were gathered from study participants and from parents of preschool and school-age children.

Method

Experimental Design

A pretest–posttest control group design (Borg & Gall, 1989) was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the active

listening strategy instructional package. The study included three phases: pretest, intervention, and posttest. Data were collected on the use of the active listening strategy by participants in both the control group (no instruction) and the experimental group (instruction).

Participants

Teacher candidates. Ten students participated in the study (see Note 1). All participants were undergraduate students in a teacher preparation program at a large northeastern university. The control group participants were enrolled in a required course in educational psychology for teacher candidates and were provided with extra credit for participation. Four were female, one was male, and their average age was 21 (range = 20–22). The experimental group participants were enrolled in a class on collaboration skills for education professionals. Participation in the instruction and assessment activities examined in this study was a regular class expectation for all students in the experimental group. Four experimental group members were female, one was male, and their average age was 21 (range = 20–21). All participants gave informed consent to participate; however, the experimental group participants gave informed consent and permission for their data to be used as part of this study after they had received their final grades for the class.

Parents. Thirty parents of preschool and school-age children provided information on the social validity of the active listening strategy. The mean age of the parents was 38, and they included 15 men and 15 women. All parents lived in a small college town in the northeastern United States. Three parents described themselves as African American, 5 described themselves as Asian American, 4 as American Indian, 2 as Hispanic American, and 16 as White/European American.

Experimental Condition

The independent variable was instruction in the four-step active listening strategy, summarized with the acronym LAFF. The steps in the strategy were identified through a search of the professional literature on effective communication skills for teachers and active listening (Cramer, 1998; Gordon, 2003; O'Shea et al., 2000; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990).

The four steps of the strategy are (a) listen, empathize, and communicate respect; (b) ask questions and ask permission to take notes; (c) focus on the issues; and (d) find a first step. Table 1 contains the steps for the strategy.

The first step—listen, empathize, and communicate respect—directs the teacher to listen carefully and convey empathy by making a statement that recognizes the

Table 1
LAFF Active Listening Strategy

L	Listen, empathize, and communicate respect
A	Ask questions and ask permission to take notes
F	Focus on the issues
F	Find a first step

parent's concern about the problem. For example, "I am sorry to hear that this has been a problem. Can you tell me more about (the problem)?" Instruction on appropriate facial expression while listening (eye contact, head nods) was provided.

Empathetic listening is frequently identified as a key communication skill for developing effective collaboration (Cramer, 1998; O'Shea et al., 2000; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). The goal is to communicate that the listener is doing his or her best to understand the partner's thoughts and feelings (empathy) and that how the speaker is feeling is important to the listener (respect). The listener works to communicate genuine interest, understanding, and acceptance of the speaker's point of view; the goal is not to agree or disagree but simply to better understand the speaker's perspective (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). To paraphrase Covey (1989), a teacher cannot really provide assistance until she or he fully understands the problem as perceived by the parent. Having a chance to talk and be listened to may also help the speaker in better understanding his or her own feelings and beliefs about a concern (Kroth & Edge, 1997).

The second step of the strategy—ask questions and ask permission to take notes—directs teachers to find out more about the perceived problem. The teacher is encouraged to ask open-ended questions to gain a better understanding of the parent's concerns. By asking questions, a teacher is more likely to get a better understanding of the parent's view and to communicate his or her interest in the parent's perspective. The teacher candidates were directed to ask permission to take notes at this time. Taking notes helps the education professional to provide a summary during the next step (focus on the issues) and also helps to communicate the professional's interest in the parent's opinion. The process of paraphrasing and summarizing the parent's point of view while taking notes also forces the teacher to actively consider what is being said.

The third step of the strategy—focus on the problem—directs teachers to attempt to summarize the identified problems as described by the parent. The notes taken above play a key role here. Teachers are told to signal the introduction of this phase of the conversation with a phrase such as "I want to make sure I have everything . . ." or "I want to make sure my notes are accurate . . ." The

teacher should then carefully review the notes with the parent, checking to see that the content is accurate. After they review the notes, the teacher should ask if there is anything the parent would like to change or add.

Reviewing the summarized information clearly communicates to the parent that the teacher is listening carefully and wants to understand the parent's concern (Cramer, 1998). Often this encourages the family member to go on speaking and may lead to the addition of important information. Paraphrasing also provides the professional with a means of checking accuracy (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). The goal is to make sure that there is a clear understanding of the issues before moving ahead.

The fourth step—find a first step—requires the teacher to make a decision as to what part (if any) of the problem is within his or her zone of control (adapted from Covey, 1989). The term *zone of control* refers to problems for which an individual can reasonably expect some direct influence on the implementation of a solution. If the problem is in an individual's zone of control, it is usually best to take some time to gather additional information before brainstorming solutions. In situations in which there is reason to believe that an individual is at risk for being harmed or for harming others, the teacher candidate is directed to immediately inform his or her supervisor and take other appropriate preventative actions. In most situations, however, a teacher would ask for time to find out more about the problem (e.g., directly observe the student, speak with other teachers) and plan a follow-up meeting with the parents. If the problem is outside the individual's zone of control (e.g., a problem with transportation, a conflict with another professional), the teacher can best help the parent by linking the parent with someone who can help (e.g., help to arrange a meeting with the transportation supervisor, provide contact information for the other professional). The teacher candidate should (as appropriate) share his or her reasoning with the parent and confirm with the parent that the proposed course of action is an appropriate next step (O'Shea et al., 2000). The teacher candidate may volunteer to help as a facilitator at a meeting for a problem outside of his or her zone of control if the parent is nervous about moving forward independently, but the teacher should be clear about the limits of his or her role in developing and carrying out solutions for problems that are outside the zone of control.

Procedure

Pretest–Posttest Measures

A pretest–posttest control group design was used. To assess participants' use of the active listening strategy, all

instructional group participants played the role of teacher in a total of eight role-play scenarios: one prior to instruction (pretest), six for practice during the instruction phase, and one following instruction (posttest). Control group participants participated in only the pretest and posttest role-plays.

In each role-play, the control and experimental group participants played the part of a teacher and held a conversation with a parent. A total of three scenarios were used in the pre- and postinstruction role-plays and were randomly assigned across participants with the provision that each scenario appeared an equal number of times in pre- and postinstruction role-plays and was used an equal number of times for control and experimental group participants; also, no participant ever received the same role-play situation twice. Six different scenarios were used by all experimental group participants for practice during the instruction phase.

For the pre- and postinstruction role-plays, two doctoral candidates in education played the role of the parent. Both of the doctoral candidates received approximately 30 minutes of training, including a short script for each of the role-plays and guided practice in acting out the role of the communication partner. Parents were told to state their initial concern clearly and to answer all teacher questions in one to two sentences. They were also told to use two follow-up probes (i.e., "Would you want this to happen with your child?" and "What are you going to do?"), if the teacher did not speak for more than 10 seconds. The parents were randomly assigned to interact with teachers with the provision that the teachers interacted with a different parent in the pre- and postintervention role-plays, the two parents appeared in the pre- and postinstruction role-plays an equal number of times, and the two parents appeared an equal number of times for control and experimental group participants.

The pre- and postinstruction role-plays were acted out in a small office and videotaped. In each role-play scenario, the participant was provided with a paragraph explaining his or her role as a teacher (e.g., with information on the grade level and educational status of their students). The parent then arrived and presented a problem to the teacher, for example, "My son is swearing at home, and he says he is learning this language at school." The parent responded to the teacher's questions and asked follow-up probes (described earlier). Procedures called for ending a conversation after 7 minutes; however, this was not needed for any of the conversations.

Intervention Phase

Instruction in the active listening strategy was provided by the first author to the 12 individuals in the

experimental group during one regularly scheduled 75-minute class and during portions of three additional classes, for a total of 120 minutes of direct instructional time. The individuals in the experimental group also participated in independent practice activities outside of the classroom for approximately 30 minutes.

A six-step instructional sequence was developed for teaching the active listening strategy, modified from the guidelines for strategy instruction suggested by the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities (Ellis & Lenz, 1987; Deshler & Schumaker, 1993). The six instructional steps are described below.

Pretest. The investigator reviewed the preintervention videotapes of the experimental group participants and noted examples of the use of the active listening strategy. Although some participants made use of some of the steps (e.g., asking a question), none of the experimental group participants demonstrated mastery of the active learning strategy prior to instruction.

Describe strategy. During the first class, the investigator introduced the topic of active listening. As an attention-getter, the investigator played a short audiotape recording of a psychologist with a national radio call-in show answering a question from a woman caller about a live-in boyfriend. The tape actually served as a non-example of active listening skills: The radio host asked only a small number of questions, frequently interrupted the caller, and provided advice without learning the details of the problem. The instructor led experimental group participants in a discussion of the conversation and elicited comments addressing three important themes: The female caller probably did not feel like she had been listened to, she probably would not phone back or talk to the psychologist again, and she probably would not follow the advice. The investigator then discussed, using examples drawn from first-person narratives of parents with disabilities, how parents often experience similar communication challenges when speaking with education professionals and participating in parent-teacher planning meetings.

The investigator then introduced the LAFF strategy using a small chart (see Table 1) and described each step of the strategy. Positive examples of strategy use were drawn from the student's preintervention videotapes, and the benefit of its use in communicating with parents and other teachers was discussed. The implications of not following the strategy in conversations with parents and other teachers (i.e., nonexamples) were also discussed.

Model the strategy. During the modeling step, a chart outlining the four steps of the strategy was presented on an overhead in front of the experimental group participants, and the investigator modeled the use of the strategy while acting out a role-play of a parent-teacher interaction (a graduate student familiar with the strategy played the part of a parent). During this modeling procedure, the investigator demonstrated thinking out loud so that the experimental group participants could witness the cognitive processes (as reported by the investigator) and the overt behaviors necessary for successful strategy use. The investigator modeled the entire strategy two times with two different scenarios. During the second model, the investigator asked questions designed to actively involve the experimental group participants (e.g., "What would be an appropriate empathy statement in this situation?").

Verbal practice. Experimental group participants memorized the strategy steps through the instructor's use of rapid-fire verbal rehearsal activities. During the initial stages of training, experimental group participants had access to the chart listing the steps in the strategy. After two rehearsals with the strategy list in view, the list was removed and experimental group participants were called on to list the steps in order both from the beginning and from investigator-selected points, for example, "What step comes after *listen, empathize, and communicate respect*?"

Practice with materials. During the next class, experimental group participants practiced the use of the strategy with role-plays in groups of three in the classroom. Experimental group participants were provided with short role-play scripts. One experimental group participant played the role of a parent, another of a teacher, and a third checked for the presence or absence of the identified steps and wrote down the questions asked by the teacher. The instructor observed groups, noting the presence and absence of targeted behaviors and giving informal feedback to the teachers. After each role-play, the entire class discussed the types of questions asked by the teachers and their probable impact both in communicating empathy and respect and in gathering information. At this time, the investigator provided positive and corrective feedback regarding the use of the active listening skills.

Provide generalization training. On two additional occasions (at the beginning of two classes on different topics), the instructor introduced a potential problem situation. These sample problems were brief outlines of actual events known to the instructor. For example,

You are a teacher in an early intervention classroom. During your planning time, a parent walks into your class and tells you that she has heard her child being discussed in a negative manner by a team-member in a public place, and she is upset.

The class then discussed appropriate statements of empathy, questions, and first steps. The instructor provided positive and corrective feedback.

Outside of the class, as a homework assignment, experimental group participants each made an audiotape in which, working with a partner, they took turns playing the part of a teacher or a parent. Each experimental group participant played a teacher in three role-plays. Students also wrote short papers in which they compared their performances on the preintervention videotapes with one of their three postinstruction role-plays. Students were directed to conduct self-assessments and to describe the difference in their use of active listening skills between the two role-plays as well as the expected impact of the presence or absence of active listening skills on the conversation with the parent. The instructor reviewed the audiotapes and the written self-assessments and provided written notes on positive examples and gave corrective feedback.

Postinstruction Phase

Two weeks after the initial training for experimental group participants, all participants again participated in a videotaped role-play situation, the posttest measure (described earlier).

Measures

In the videotape role-plays, the main dependent variable was strategy use. Strategy use was assessed using a scoring rubric of four 5-point scales, one scale for each step of the strategy. To evaluate the social validity of the active listening strategy, data were collected on the perceived usefulness of the instruction as reported by the participating teacher candidates. In addition, parents of preschool and school-age children observed the videotapes and provided feedback on the communication skills of the experimental group participants. Each of the measures is discussed in further detail in the following.

Scoring Strategy Use

The participants' use of each of the four steps was scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*use of strategy step was absent or inappropriate*) to 4 (*complete effective*)

use of the targeted strategy step). All tapes were independently scored by two trained raters, one of whom was blind to the training status of the participants. Interjudge agreement was 95%; disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Social Validity

Information on the social validity of the instruction was obtained from the teacher candidates who received instruction in the active listening strategy and from parents of school-age children.

Teacher candidates. On two occasions, the five experimental group participants provided written responses to six statements describing their comfort and skills in communicating with parents. Participants used a 5-point Likert-type scale (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) to respond to such statements as “I expect I will find talking with parents to be stressful” and “I am prepared to help parents with problems.” The first administration took place at the beginning of the semester; the second administration was after the experimental group participants had been taught the LAFF active listening strategy and had participated in the posttest role-play. After instruction in the active listening strategy, experimental group participants also rated two additional statements: “Learning the LAFF strategy was a good use of my time” and “I would recommend that other preservice teachers learn the LAFF strategy.”

Parents of school-age children. To gain insight into the perceived usefulness of the active listening strategy from a parent’s perspective, 30 parents of preschool and school-age children observed three pairs of videotaped role-plays of the experimental group teacher candidates. For each pair, parents observed the same teacher candidate in both pre- and postintervention role-plays. The presentation of pre- and postintervention tapes was counterbalanced, and the parents were blind to the status of the tape (i.e., they did not know if the tape was made pre- or postintervention). After each pair of pre- and postintervention tapes, parents were asked to (a) identify the tape in which the teacher did a better job of communicating with the parent and (b) describe what the teacher candidate did differently in the preferred tape.

Results

Scored Role-Plays

The Mann-Whitney U test, a nonparametric alternative to the t test, was used to examine the scored performance of the experimental and control groups on the

role-plays. The Mann-Whitney U compares the rank sums between two groups (Hollander & Wolfe, 1973) and has been described as appropriate for use with small samples (Curtis & Marascuilo, 2004). As the first step in the analysis, the observations from both groups are combined and ranked smallest to largest. The sum of the ranks for each group is calculated and then compared with that of the other group. A significant p value ($p < .05$) indicates a significant difference between the two groups.

There was no statistically significant difference between the pretest scores of the experimental and control groups nor between the pretest and posttest scores of the control group participants (see Table 2). There was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group (two-tailed test of asymptotic significance, $p = .04$) and between the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups (two-tailed test of asymptotic significance, $p = .008$). Cohen (1988) suggested that any effect size greater than .8 should be considered large; the Mann-Whitney U test indicated that the mean rank of the posttest scores of the experimental group were more than 2.67 standard deviations different than the mean rank score of the control group.

Social Validity: Preservice Education Professionals

All experimental group participants completed a Likert-type scale containing six statements dealing with their comfort levels and skills in communicating with parents. Prior to the LAFF training, only one participant agreed with the statement “I am prepared to work with parents.” Following the LAFF training, all respondents indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Sample comments from the participants included “I just need to remember I don’t need to give an answer right away, (I can take) time to think.”

Participants also provided Likert-type ratings for the five remaining statements: “I am worried about talking with parents,” “Talking with parents is stressful,” “I expect I will enjoy talking with parents,” “Talking with parents helps in development of appropriate solutions,” and “If I talk with parents they may think I am not competent.” For these statements, participant responses either remained unchanged or reflected a slightly more positive attitude (i.e., participants reported that they were less worried about talking to parents). Sample comments included “I do not fear working with parents. I actually look forward to it and I know I am prepared.”

At the second administration of the survey, the participants were asked to respond to two additional statements regarding the usefulness of training in the LAFF strategy. In response to the first statement, “Learning the

Table 2
Scored Use of Active Listening Strategy

Condition	Pretest			Posttest		
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Median
Control	3	7	4	3	6	3
Experimental	3	6	4	14	16	16

LAFF strategy was a good use of my time,” three of the five respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, and two respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement. In response to the second statement, “I would recommend that other preservice teachers learn the LAFF strategy,” all respondents indicated either agreement or strong agreement. Sample comments included, “This strategy has helped me to communicate more effectively in situations dealing with problems” and “It helps to organize thoughts and provides a ‘method’ to go through conversations and cover topics in good time.”

Social Validity: Parents

When asked to identify the role-play in which the teacher demonstrated stronger communication skills, both culturally and linguistically diverse parents, including African American, American Indian, Asian American, and Hispanic American ($n = 14$), and White English-speaking parents ($n = 16$), overwhelmingly selected the postinstruction videotape (98% and 96%, respectively). When asked (in response to an open-ended question) to identify the important teacher skills used in the preferred videotape, the top three behaviors noted by parents were taking notes (82%), discussing next steps (76%), and appearing attentive and concerned (61%).

Discussion

This research provides evidence that active listening skills can be taught in an efficient and effective manner to preservice education professionals and that the use of these targeted communication skills is viewed positively by parents of preschool and school-age children. Although past research has clearly described some of the communication challenges present in interactions between education professionals and parents (Bernhard et al., 1998; Lasky, 2000), there have been few systematic attempts to teach new communication behaviors to education professionals.

Although the strategy instruction model used here is most commonly applied in work with students with learning disabilities (Ellis & Lenz, 1987), the instructional approaches are in fact drawn from the research literature on

effective instruction for a wide variety of learners (Ellis & Lenz, 1987). A relatively short period of instructional time (approximately 120 minutes of in-class instruction and 30 minutes of independent practice) resulted in the acquisition of the targeted active listening skills. This compares favorably with the 6 hours of training reported by Lisper and Rautalinko (1996) and the 45 hours of training reported by Paukert et al. (2004), although it should be acknowledged that the Paukert et al. training activities appeared to have targeted skills in addition to active listening.

Learning to make use of the targeted active listening skills was valued by the preservice education professionals. Following the training, the preservice education professionals described themselves as more confident in their abilities to work with parents and recommended that this strategy be taught to other preservice education professionals. The active listening skills were taught to the preservice education professionals as part of a larger class called Skills for Working With Parents and Education Professionals. This class can be taken at the beginning or near the end of the four-semester preservice training program. Perhaps more important than the time of scheduling are the associated activities that precede the instruction on active listening—the preservice education professionals read and discuss first-person accounts on parenting a child with a disability. The instructional goal for this activity is that the preservice education professionals become more aware of both the joys and the challenges of parenting a child with a disability and are motivated to acquire the skills, including active listening, that would support strong collaboration between parents and professionals.

The active listening skills demonstrated by the trained participants also were recognized and valued by parents of preschool and school-age children. Lisper and Rautalinko (1996) report that past interventions involving training in active listening skills have not always resulted in a change that is perceptible to the communication partner. It is of interest to note that the parents in this study not only identified the postinstruction performance as preferable over the preinstruction performance but also, in response to an open-ended question, identified the participants' use of targeted skills (e.g., appearing concerned, taking notes of parent comments) as contributing to

their selection of the postinstruction tape as the preferred one.

This small-scale investigation represents an initial attempt to examine the teaching of targeted communication skills to preservice education professionals and to investigate the importance of these behaviors to parents. Future research should investigate the impact of these instructional activities with a larger sample size so as to better address issues of generalization. Although the first author has received anecdotal reports of successful use of this strategy from program graduates, follow-up studies of the real-world use of these skills would also be of interest.

Summary

Lea (2006) examined the interactions between early intervention professionals and mothers of children with disabilities and reported that “providers did not know the mothers with whom they were interacting. . . . They knew little about their lives, experiences, beliefs, hopes, or dreams” (p. 277). The development of valued and trusting relationships between education professionals and parents can be a complicated process and can involve issues of beliefs about educational goals, power, and cultural values (Bernhard et al., 1998; Harry, 1992; Lasky, 2000). The need to give time and attention to the relationship, however, is clear—developing collaborative relationships with parents may in fact be as important as any direct intervention provided to the child (Dunst, 2000; Smith & Hubbard, 1988a).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) has suggested that strong interpersonal communication between parent and teacher is essential to the building of supportive connections between home and school and that these connections can have a powerful impact on a child’s development. The use of active listening and other effective communication strategies may be an important first step to developing the trust, mutual respect, and knowledge of shared purposes that will be necessary for a productive parent–teacher relationship (Lasky, 2000). This study provides evidence that focused training in the use of active listening skills can produce observable improvement in communication skills and that the use of these skills is valued by both preservice education professionals and the parents of young children.

Note

1. All students in the class ($N = 12$) provided informed consent and participated in the experimental group training. However, because only five control group participants were available for both pre- and posttesting, the data for the five experimental participants were chosen at random from the data available for all available experimental group participants to allow for a statistical comparison of the two groups.

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